

Partisan Review

THE NATIONAL INTEREST & THE PENTAGON PAPERS
Noam Chomsky, Hans Morgenthau, and others

ART, CULTURE & CONSERVATISM
Richard Gilman and

John Bayley, Norman Birnbaum, Cecil Brown, Robert
Brustein, Robert Creeley, Stanley Diamond, Morris
Dickstein, Thomas R. Edwards, Allen Ginsberg,
Clement Greenberg, Ihab Hassan, Christopher Lasch,
Mary McCarthy, Richard Poirier, John Henry Raleigh,
Harold Rosenberg, Andrew Sarris, Ronald Sukenick
and Tony Tanner.

MAX FRISCH

Stories by

LEONARD MICHAELS

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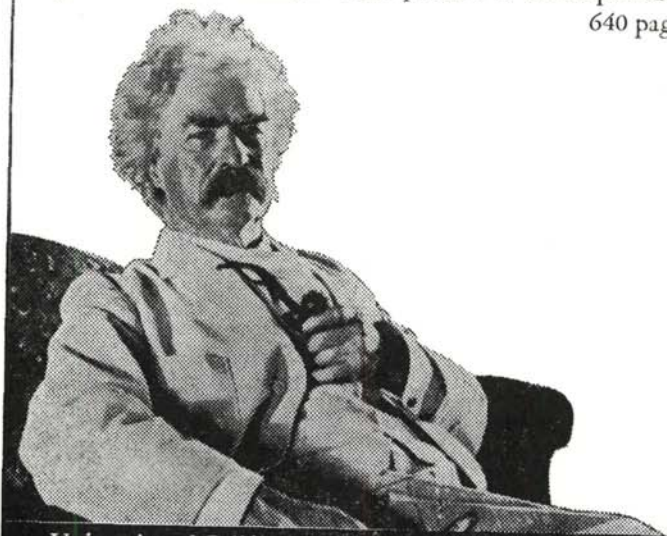
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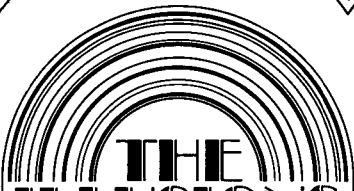


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NOTES

We didn't have room for **BOOKS** this time, but we'll run an enlarged review section in the fall issue.

Harcourt Brace put out **MAX FRISCH's** *Homo Faber* in paper last year. Jack Richardson is doing the script for the movie version of *I'm Not Stille*. . . . **LEONARD MICHAELS** is at Berkeley. . . . Pantheon is putting out a collection of **NOAM CHOMSKY's** essays in early 1973. . . . **HANS MORGENTHAU** is at the Graduate Center of CCNY. . . . **ROBERT VAS DIAS** has begun work assembling poems for an anthology of Earth-poetry—work which relates to the ecosystem or which expresses an ecological awareness. . . . **DAN GERBER** is working on his second collection of poems, *Departure*, and on a novel tentatively called *American Atlas*. . . . Bobbs-Merrill published **CAROL BERGE's** *From a Soft Angle: Poems About Women* and *A Couple Called Moebius* this year. . . . **JOHN BAYLEY** is at New College, Oxford. . . . **CECIL BROWN** is working on a script, "The Young, Black, Jewish Indian." . . . **ROBERT BRUSTEIN** is Dean of the Yale School of Drama and Artistic Director of the Yale Repertory Theatre. Next year he will be guest theater critic of *The London Observer*. . . . Scribner's is bringing out **ROBERT CREELEY's** *A Day Book* in September. . . . **STANLEY DIAMOND** is in anthropology at the New School. . . . **TOM EDWARDS** will be on a Guggenheim for 1972-73. . . . **ALLEN GINSBERG** has just returned from a visit/communion with Australian Aboriginal song-men. . . . **CLEMENT GREENBERG** is the noted art critic. . . . **IHAB HASSAN** is currently interested in Paracriticism, a form of experimental writing. . . . **MARY MCCARTHY's** latest novel is *Birds of America*. . . . **JOHN HENRY RALEIGH** is Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Berkeley. . . . Horizon put out **HAROLD ROSENBERG's** *The De-definition of Art* this spring. . . . **ANDREW SARRIS** is the film critic for *The Village Voice*. . . . **RONALD SUKENICK** is working on a new novel and on a work called "The Endless Short Story." . . . **TONY TANNER** will be teaching at the Kyoto American Studies Summer Seminar this year. . . . **TODD GITLIN** is at New College, San Jose State, in California. . . . Vanguard will be bringing out a new collection of **JOYCE CAROL OATES's** short stories, *Marriages and Infidelities*, in August. . . . **ALICIA OSTRIKER** will be finishing her second book of poems next year.

We regret the following errors which slipped into our Spring issue (PR, #2, 1972). In **Peter Brooks's** "The Melodramatic Imagination" lines 4 through 20 on page 199 should have appeared after line 24 on page 202. Copies of the corrected text are available at the PR office. In **Herbert Marcuse's** "Art and Revolution" footnote 1 on page 174 should have read: *Kursbuch*, 16, 1969, p. 31; and the sentence beginning on line 6 of page 185 should have read: "And if such transcendence is an essential quality of all art, it follows that the goals of the revolution may find expression in bourgeois art, and in all forms of art."

PR is looking for what we call Intellectual Cartoons. Contributions are invited.

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LOOKING BACKWARD

The New Cultural Conservatism. Symposia don't settle anything, but I think this one on cultural conservatism is quite useful in bringing into the open a polarization that pushes both camps too far and sidetracks criticism into factional warfare.

My own bias is clearly on the side of those who believe there is a backbite. But I must say those who insist, like Clement Greenberg and Robert Brustein, that just the opposite is happening, that anything goes today, argue very impressively. They are right when they point out that the market is glutted with radical kitsch. We all know that the cultural entrepreneurs exploit anything they think is new or hot, and that both popular and academic critics are afraid to be left behind by what they think is the new art. But this is all in the world of fashion and publicity, and in that part of academia catering to the worst part of the radical and youth culture. Perhaps *PR*'s statement did not make clear enough we were talking about serious critics and writers in the literary journals, where the reaction to the real and imagined excesses of the last decade stands out. Here we see, as the statement suggests, an embattled conservatism not only coming out in favor of high standards — who's against? — but spreading suspicion of anything not already enshrined.

For example, John Bayley, who in other areas is a perceptive critic, goes so far as to make a principle of ignoring contemporary writing. Bayley's is a peculiarly academic brand of conservatism, like Northrop Frye's, in that it assumes a given literary history and is blind to the role of contemporary writing in reshaping that history.

Of course, there are other criticisms of current writing. Thus Lasch is disturbed by certain frivolous trends today, but his response is too complex to bolster the standard conservative view. His uneasiness about the radical culture seems to stem from a kind of enlightened Marxism, which favors an explicitly humanist art. There are, in fact, two opposing strains in radical thinking about the arts: the more humanist one represented by figures like Lukács or Adorno, and the more aesthetic one found in Benjamin, for example, or Trotsky, who thought the natural form of revolutionary art in our period was bohemianism. Lasch comes

out on the humanist side, while I lean, I should say, toward the bohemian theory, that is, toward the view that in certain periods unpolitical art is most political. But the humanist approach often degenerates into a support of conventional and representational art — which is the case with those political radicals Lasch says are on the same side as the political conservatives in their literary views. Anyhow, it is not entirely a theoretical question, for it depends largely on the specific literary and political circumstances. The main problem at any time, I think, is the concrete one of distinguishing on the one hand retrograde from advanced social art and on the other empty experiment from that which renovates the medium because its impulses are not purely formal.

Basically, those arguing against a conservative literary stand — Gilman, Poirier, Dickstein, Tanner, Sukenick — see modernist and avant-garde writing as processes taking different shapes in different periods, not as brand names for the products of a specific time. But underlying the whole debate is the question of tradition. Those who see the present not only as the graveyard of modernism but of all values and standards have a definite idea of the literary tradition which they feel is being violated, not reshaped. Those who see some life in the present have either a different or a more fluid idea of tradition.

Generally, writers and thinkers committed to change question accepted definitions of the mainstream, and inherited ideas of the serious and the highbrow. And at a time when an open stance of this kind naturally appeals to everyone who would like to think of himself as young and adventurous, it is not surprising that some even go so far as to proclaim the breakdown of all forms and beliefs. But the fact is we all have our limits, beyond which we feel self-expression and gimmickry threaten to take over the proper uses of the medium. Thus I do not care for most of the multimedia enterprises, or the political use of popular culture, particularly the popular culture of Madison Avenue. The reason, I suppose, is that my tastes were formed by the early modernists at a time when it seemed that mass culture threatened to corrupt those tastes. In any case, I see no way of solving this dilemma except by being flexible without surrendering one's own sensibility.

The radical stances in the pieces by Hassan and Brown don't help the situation, for the attitudes they strike are what the conservatives are reacting against. Hassan's piece is quite mannered in its use of idiosyncratic forms as a mode of criticism, and arbitrary in that some of his likes seem to have nothing to do with advanced writing or thinking. Brown is a witty and talented writer, but his division of literature and politics into black and white doesn't illuminate either. When he talks concretely about *Mr. Sammler's Planet* he is quite sharp, but when he

generalizes about the book he sounds as though its conservative values can be attributed solely to the fact that Bellow is white.

The trouble is that the cultural conservatives, though they may be right in their criticism of radical postures, are holding on to a deadening view of tradition. The modernism they mourn has been absorbed into literary history, and has long since been replaced by the tamer, more easily assimilable writing of the last few decades. In fiction, for example, most of those who claim to cherish the great modernists actually have been drawn to the domesticated variety of naturalism tailored to the market, not to the stylized or tortured or monumental naturalism of Flaubert or Dostoevski or Tolstoy. Nor are these tastes purely formal, since they go along with a more conventional and orderly sense of experience. For all their nostalgia for the golden age of modernism, these cultural conservatives do not exhibit any great enthusiasm for the tradition of writers like Kafka or Joyce, who would seem to be closer to the absurdities and contradictions of our lives.

It might be good to keep in mind that always in periods of change we are barraged with apocalyptic talk about the new barbarism and with memories of better times. To be sure, there is no lack of advanced as well as conservative nonsense today. But the backlash is worse than the disease.¹

The National Interest. The question of the national interest is tricky, and though it is argued quite brilliantly by Chomsky and Morgenthau, its definition seems to escape both of them. If, as Chomsky claims, in almost classic Marxist terms, the national interest is the interest of the wealthy and upper classes, and the domino theory is correct in that the spread of communism does threaten American power, he is saying both that there is and that there isn't a truly national interest. In either case, according to Chomsky, America is imperialist. Then one has to ask in the name of what force or position does one oppose America's foreign policy. The answer, I would think, has to be that opposition to the "national interest," which is political as well as economic, comes from a support of world revolution. Lenin, it will be recalled, thought all revolutionaries had to be for the defeat of their own country, because he believed the working class had no stake in its own government, or in any "national interest." But the

1 I have just seen Mary McCarthy's witty and incisive piece, which was delayed by the French mail. I thought she underestimated the spread of cultural conservatism here, on which Bellow does not have a monopoly. But it was nice to be reassured by critical writing of such a high order that the youth brigade and the old guard are not our only choices.

situation is more complicated today. Would one also oppose the government and the national interest of Russia, which Chomsky refers to, or China, or North Vietnam? If not, then obviously one is siding with the "national interests" of these countries in the conflict with America. This strikes me as a genuine problem for radicals, though perhaps it is only one aspect of the general dilemma today.

Morgenthau, on the other hand, believes there is a genuine national interest, not purely economic and not limited to big business, that because of stupidity is not being served in Vietnam. What he doesn't spell out, though he seems to imply it, is that it is in the national interest to oppose the spread of communism, but not in Vietnam. If this is so, one would like to know when the national interest has been correctly pursued recently, when, that is, communism has been properly opposed. If never, we would have to define America as a country so powerful it could ignore its national interest.

Edmund Wilson. In a world of growing academicism and specialization, and general hostility to wide-ranging criticism, Edmund Wilson was one of the few men of letters. He had the sensibility of an explorer. This meant, of course, that he combined the virtues and the faults of the writer who made a profession of being an amateur in all fields.

We never became friends, and I hadn't seen him for a number of years. But my memories of Edmund Wilson go back to the thirties, when he generously went out of his way to praise some things I had written. I remember, too, long walks in the rain around Union Square, where *PR*'s office was, while he kept plying me with questions about Marxist theory, particularly in relation to art. I was especially moved by the unassuming manner of the older, famous man in wanting to know what younger people were writing and thinking.

W.P.

STORIES

Max Frisch

LUCK

"I had luck, Fyodor Ivanovitch, I've barely got the courage to think about it. Incredible luck. You see: I'm traveling first class. I've got a passport, I've got a title, I'm free. I still don't understand why I wasn't sent to Siberia, it very nearly happened, God knows, it very nearly happened," he says, and instead of inhaling a pinch of snuff he inserts tobacco into a Charatan pipe; and there's no samovar humming, but it's winter, and this is a railroad train, and when the pipe finally catches, the traveler, looking out the window, says: "It's snowing." But that's Switzerland outside, not Russia. "I had no grounds for jealousy," he says, as though someone were interested in his story, "absolutely none. Natasha was married, but I was well aware of it from the very start. Perhaps I was even glad that Natasha was married. Now you're surely thinking, it's not quite proper, because Natasha was married. But nowadays things are different, Fyodor Ivanovitch. Her husband was a quiet and soft-spoken man, even younger than I, a righteous and downtrodden person. It may be that Natasha didn't understand him. But I left my wife and children for her. I didn't think it was a moral thing to do, but it did make me happy. I loved her, Fyodor Ivanovitch, I loved Natasha." There's no one in the compartment whose name could be Fyodor Ivanovitch or Vassily Vassilikov or whatever, but he has to tell the story all the same. "You see, I rarely think about it, so as not to take fright, actually never," he says: "I was a grown man then, a respected man so to speak, and I believe you have guessed it, Fyodor Ivanovitch, I could very easily be a murderer!" Even the conductor, who passes by at one point and looks into the compartment, is obviously

not a Russian, he's a Swiss *conducteur*, a young and rosy fellow with a red pouch that dangles about his knees, not an unfriendly person, but he has no time either the way people once did in Russian trains when they listened to half an epic, and after he's left the compartment, the traveler says: "But does it really interest you?" A while ago, he was in the dining car; the people there look at their plates or past one another, and when they've paid the check they may nod, but by then it's too late to say: "I'm a sick man . . . a bad person. . . . A repulsive person. I think I have liver trouble." Who wants to know? "God knows I had already lifted the small ax, and Natasha sat before me, I wanted to split her apart like a log. I didn't want to of course, but the ax wanted to, the small ax, Fyodor Ivanovitch, in my hand." You don't say this in a dining car, nor in a compartment after a gentleman has come in, barely saying good afternoon and wanting to read his newspaper. His name may be Hubacher or Vogelsanger, a Swiss gentleman, and the horrible thing had happened in Grisons, not in Russia. "Do you know the area around Bivio?" A thing like that he can say, even if the other man is surprised and says: "Why?" There's no samovar humming, only his Charatan pipe is sputtering. "A nice pipe," he says, "isn't it?" The man sitting out of view behind his open paper is surely not a bad person; his coat is a good coat with fine lining. "I am a sick man, which I may not be at all, I am a ridiculous man," he says outside in the corridor: "By the way, I lied before, Fyodor Ivanovitch. Perhaps you noticed. I didn't leave my wife and children for her sake. That's nonsense. I left them for my sake! — after all, I left Natasha too, later on — and Vassa — . Now you think I'm unscrupulous, Fyodor Ivanovitch, but that's not true at all. She was too good for me, I mean my first wife. I never beat her, as God is my witness, but it was a blessing for her that I left her. Now, everyone admits it. They were always too good for me, and some day I would have had to realize that they were suffering, you understand, sooner or later. There was gossip every time, the same gossip. That's why I traveled so much. Today I know: It's the other way around. What are scruples! On the contrary, women were always happier when I left them, or at least no unhappier — there weren't that many anyway, Fyodor Ivanovitch, in case you think so. . . . Now we're in Biel, I believe," he says, and corrects himself, using the French form:

"Bienne." It's still snowing. Nowadays the trains never stop for long; the passengers can't go out to get hot water and they don't serve tea in the dining car anymore, only complete meals. "I had no grounds for jealousy," he says, to continue his story, "they were her brothers. . . . I don't know how it came over me that night. It was in a ski hut. She had made some mulled wine for her brothers because it was cold, she spoke only to her brothers that night, and her brothers spoke only to her, I wasn't part of the family. I found it funny, that is to say, I tried to find it funny, it *was* funny, Fyodor Ivanovitch, but I'm a vain person. I just couldn't take Natasha's being more attached to her brothers than to me. Am I possessive? I wasn't drunk, after all she had prepared the mulled wine for her brothers; I didn't want any. You can imagine how cheerful it was. I didn't say a word, for by now they were only speaking French. You understand, that added to it. It's ridiculous. Suddenly I hated her, observed her from aside and hated her, totally sober as I was. Or at least so I thought; actually I loved her, but I hated the clan in her. The clan! — I always find a clan awful, I could kill them. . . . It came over me when we went to bed, all of us together, Natasha and her brothers and I. To be exact: Natasha between her brothers and myself. It was cold. I had been tending the wood-fire that whole long evening, but she had made the hot wine for her brothers. They were already snoring when a rage came over me, I felt it tear my blanket away suddenly and seize me from outside, the rage, and it made me sit up in the dark. . . . Did I mention that her brother, the older one, was an officer? He was the stupider one, but Natasha never reprimanded him. The younger one was a dancer, a choreographer or something of the sort, some kind of performer. He was the one Natasha really admired — for the first time I understood who I was: her lover. . . . It's possible that Natasha asked me in the dark whether I was all right, whispering so that her brothers could keep snoring; I didn't hear her. I've been to superior schools, but I am and always will be a primitive person. Natasha would never have thought it of me. And her brothers, not knowing anything more than the fact that I loved Natasha, would never have thought it of me either. . . . It was winter, I've already said that, and it was night, I didn't know where to go. Out into the deep snow. I wanted to freeze to death, you understand, while they snored in the hut," he says

and stops, because once again someone is coming through the narrow corridor. "Fyodor Ivanovitch, do you believe in God?" he asks, without expecting any answer. "By now I would already have spent fifteen years in Siberia for a stupid murder. Maybe I would have learned how to believe. It doesn't take much, that's all I know for sure. Perhaps I would have learned to believe in grace, Fyodor Ivanovitch. Now I merely believe in luck," he says and scrapes out the Charatan pipe while the gentleman, whose name could be Vogel-sanger or Barlöcher or something of the sort, takes his leather briefcase and leaves the compartment, not without nodding. "In short," he says, as soon as he has sat down again in the cushioned compartment, "I wanted to freeze to death. I hated myself, Fyodor Ivanovitch, I was ashamed. It wasn't cold enough for me to freeze to death, it was only unbearable. A starry night. My stiff corpse in the snow the next morning, that wasn't merely a ludicrous and wretched plan, it was also impossible to carry out, for I was only shivering when it began to dawn in the east, over the mountains. Natasha was asleep. She knew nothing about my plan, nobody under the starry sky knew anything about my ludicrous carryings-on. Only I knew! . . . Now we're in Brugg, I believe," he says, a glance out the window, "Brugg or Baden." These are not epic distances. "Perhaps I'm boring you, Fyodor Ivanovitch, but you're the first person that I've ever told my story to. . . . When I finally went back to the hut, I considered myself completely sane, rational and cold in my decision to wordlessly get my skis and go down to the valley in the early light in order to write Natasha a letter. She was too good for me too. An angel! . . . I really don't know whether you've ever experienced it, Fyodor Ivanovitch, that consciousness of being ridiculous, of being abject, which is more agonizing than a starry night in the snow, or at least that's how I felt when I heard the brothers snoring above me. What had they done to me, after all, the officer and the performer? Their sister had treated them to mulled wine, and I understand a little French. . . . Well, I got the little ax to chop wood, because after two hours in the snow I was freezing in my foolishness. I was freezing in my bones. I had started a fire for them, now I started a fire for myself. It cracks of course, I mean the log, when the ax gets stuck in it and when you bang the log and the ax on the block. The clan's snoring was subsiding. I was glad now

that I was shivering, for this gave me the right to chop the log and make firewood, fuel, the way people like us do it, not without a certain amount of risk. It must have looked funny, but it wasn't at all funny, Fyodor Ivanovitch. When Natasha came down and asked what in the world I was doing, I said: 'I'm making mulled wine.' She was sleepy and not as attractive as usual, as on the previous evening, and since she was sleepy I said more clearly: 'Mulled wine for myself!' Yet I was ashamed. Her reasonableness, Fyodor Ivanovitch, her female reasonableness! — You just don't know Natasha. We'd been in love for three years already, I mean, she is a completely irrational person, a true human being, but now her reasonableness at five o'clock in the morning was annoying. 'Mulled wine,' I screamed, 'go away!' Natasha thought she knew me, otherwise Natasha wouldn't have sat down on the block as though it were meant for her to sit on, Natasha in blue overalls and with her hair loose, and warm from sleep. The brothers of course, after being awoken by my chopping, were listening; she said: '*Qu'est-ce que tu fais?*' I said it again: 'Mulled wine!' With a certain stress, you know what I mean, Natasha thought I was joking, I'm not sure, or that I was being stubbornly inconsiderate toward the others, not just her two brothers. I forgot to mention that there were others in the hut, daughters and sons and what not, a whole clan, when I said: 'Go away!' and raised the small ax," he says, "in order to chop up some kindling wood, firewood —" he says and scrapes out the pipe again just to keep silent, but then he can't after all: "Now we're in Schlieren," he says, a look out the window: "Fyodor Ivanovitch, have you ever thrown a chair out on the street, and then another, and another? — I've never improved, you see, that was with Vassa, that was later on, I had grounds for jealousy and I was drunk, an absolute lush, the chairs were made of iron, my rage seized them and flung them from the terrace down to the street, and I didn't turn into a murderer, Fyodor Ivanovitch. How do you explain that?" He pauses until the pipe takes again. "You must believe in God, Fyodor Ivanovitch, otherwise you wouldn't smile at me. Be honest, admit you feel sorry for me, Fyodor Ivanovitch, you think I'm a stupid and superficial person. I don't feel sorry for myself. . . . I wasn't crazy, at that instant I knew perfectly well that all my foolishness had nothing to do with Natasha, who was looking at me, or

her brothers, but now I couldn't hold the small ax anymore although Natasha was sitting in front of me and looking at me. I think I couldn't even pronounce her name, the name I loved so much, all I heard was: '*Qu'est-ce que tu fais?*' Then the small ax stuck in the block, she was standing at the side, I still held the log that I had wanted to split — that was all, Fyodor Ivanovitch: Luck!" he says and keeps staring out the window where the yellow lights of a station are racing past: "That was Altstetten already," he says indifferently, and it's almost time to take his coat down and whatever the traveler has, not much, a small package, perfume for his wife. His coat never or hardly ever has a loop on it, so that he usually throws it onto the baggage rack, and when he looks around to where his coat is, he seems amazed that Fyodor Ivanovitch is sitting opposite him, right under his coat, with a vague smile: "*Batiushka* (old chap), is that your whole story?" People are already crowding into the corridor. "No," says the traveler, without getting his coat down, and similarly sarcastic: "Fyodor Ivanovitch." The latter is a small gentleman, not old, but with curly hair that's obviously prematurely gray, and with conspicuously flashing eyes; his coat is shabby but it was obviously made by a very fine tailor and it has fur on the collar, Persian lamb, and he has a fur cap on his head; when his coat is unbuttoned you can see a *poddiova* underneath and a Russian blouse with gaudy embroidered trimming: "My name is Podsynshev," he says as though people ought to know the name, and then: "May I offer you some of my tea? It's very strong however." The tea, which he brewed two stations ago, is really like beer. "Podsynshev," he repeats bitterly; he talks with a slight cough: "*Batiushka*, why don't you tell me your entire story, your real story, you can see that someone is listening to you." They can feel in their feet that the train is starting to grind to a halt. "Fine," says the traveler, "I'll tell it to you," as though he hasn't heard the conductor who announces in every compartment: "Zurich terminal, last stop!" — He pauses for an instant, rubs his face and begins: "If I am to tell my story, I have to start from the very beginning: I have to tell where I was born and who brought me up, who were my friends, what I have learned, and everything that led to my miserable story. . . ."

(Translated from the German by Joachim Neugroschel)

Leonard Michaels

THE CAPTAIN

1

From course to course Stanger smiled at my wife. She smiled at him and ate dessert, her pinky so nicely hooked it tore my heart. The dessert was pear under chocolate and flaming brandy. It slipped from spoon to blubbery dissolution, tricking Fat Red, the ancient scientist, who wallows in every head. When I tried to taste I swallowed. Then came a flickering city of liqueurs. Then marijuana, green and gold, like another language popping around the table from mouth to mouth. No cigarette went by me unlipped and sucked. But nothing tasted, and nothing had. Throughout the meal I'd devoured textures, not tastes, like a cat gobbling kill. I'd eaten tremendously. I wanted to eat. The other guests flashed marvels achieved, readiness to die. Music began in the drawing room, black, full of drum, summoning us to further pleasures. Actual blacks, stationed around the table, looked stiff and smug in their tuxedos, their faces gleaming consummation. I assumed they'd pissed in the soup. Stanger smiled at her. She at him. Through glass, silver, a wall of flowers, and the ministrations of swift black hands, everyone at the table had smiled for the last two hours. Servants were the price elegance pays to pain. The Stangers alone couldn't have made this occasion for forty guests without threatening every institution upon which our society stands. To that sentiment I drank piss. A ritual initiation. I'd never been to such a dinner party; but I could tell it was first-rate. Teeth stabbed out of my ass to eat the chair. However, the meal was over. Stanger rose and his hand claimed my wife's lower back. They strolled to the drawing room, a sight very flattering to me, the lovely valley of her back appreciated in his hand, yet it gave me a feeling I didn't know what to do with, couldn't understand, act upon, or use. Like Hamlet's in Elsinore. But this was no dingy, boozy castle in barbaric Denmark. This was Now Town, Sutton Place. The windows triangulated, above the East River, north to Welfare Island, south to the Statue of Liberty. I couldn't make a speech or kill. I did what I could. I tried not to look at them and joined the other guests, wondering what brought them here. Did

they all want jobs? Stanger had said during our interview, "Come to dinner, Mr. Liebowitz, on Bastille Day. We'll talk some more about the job." I arrived. He nodded to me, took Mildred's arm, then talked to her, to no one else, and here I was, his dinner in my gut, grass in my brain, talking to myself, thinking grass. How do you play this game? Like a delegate to my thinking, Mrs. Stanger swept boldly through the grass. "So, Mr. Liebowitz, you're interested in publishing," and she led me to a chair opposite hers. "You'll make a lovely publisher." Her shoes were gold, her dress was white material through which I couldn't tell if I couldn't see. Intimations of symmetry seesawed her voice. Slowly, precisely, she crossed her legs, sliding white skin beneath white, translucent membrane. Her shoe was winding in the air. I looked. "You can have the shoe, Mr. Liebowitz. Are you a man who wants things?" I said, "Everyone must want your things, Mrs. Stanger."

And that's what I thought. Nevertheless, I'd begged until Mildred dressed for this party, combed her hair, and showed me good girl in the aspect of sullen bitch: "Do you *want* to walk so quickly, Phillip? Do you *want* to suppose Stanger won't give you the job if we're two minutes late? Is it thrilling to have people think you're out with a whore? Is that what you *want*? Take my arm, you bastard, or I won't go another step." A savage ride on the IRT, then worse in the crosstown cab. "Two bucks for a lousy cab," she said. "But if I need, really need, a pair of shoes you throw a fit. Tomorrow, I buy shoes. Hear me?" She hadn't wanted to go. I had wanted to rush. Stanger had nodded to me, taken her arm, and, la-la — I looked — his hand was on her knee. Wanting not to go, she had a moral advantage; she could blow him and lift a virtuous face: "Don't give me that jealous crap."

Mrs. Stanger, apparently, wanted symmetry. A social lady with a Viking face, symmetrical by instinct. The ghost of long bone figure, unexorcised by a life of such occasions, still fighting, giving good as it got. Perfect for Stanger. Why not for me? One thinks meat or languishes.

Her eyes were tiger-bronze. They looked at me; not, across the room, at them. She seemed to be saying, "Do you really want the job, Mr. Liebowitz?" And she was. Winding her shoe, stirring a golden pool of time. I had five seconds, perhaps, to seem not stupid.

The mathematics of her face demanded precision, answers in kind, not self-analysis. I clicked on the smarts:

Stanger wanted Mildred; his missus wanted me. I wanted the job. The question now was what could I get. The answer answered everything. If I couldn't just get what I wanted, I had to want what I could get, to get what I wanted. Things equal to the same, equal one another. "Do you really want the job, Mr. Liebowitz?" I said, "Let's fuck."

"You are a party pooper." She blinked, then sighed and shook her head.

I'd been too quick. Too smart. I shrugged like a man with nothing more to say, and looked across the room at them, sitting close together on a couch, talking. To express life's failure I lifted a cigarette. Mrs. Stanger knocked it out of my mouth.

"That's a social disease, Mr. Liebowitz."

She stood up in a blur of dancing and a storm of jazz, turned away, pushed through shuddering couples, and went around a corner, disappeared. Reappeared. Frowning at me. To my feet, I leaped.

Down a hall in pursuit of her gliding back, all feeling concentrated in crotch, a monolithic shark with blood in its nose and no least appetite for analysis. I'd read that eating is the final extension of touch and believed it. I also believed the reverse. Paintings, etchings, great Chinese jugs, chairs, tables, sculptured metals whispered as they flashed by — because I looked at none of them — "Beast, beast, beast." They whispered, one by one, the great eyeball-sucking-life-deniers, vanishing behind me, "Beast, beast, beast." Right. Psychology was dead. I didn't feel too sure I understood my motives, but that wasn't proof I had any. Does the moon have a motive? "Love," said Aristotle. All right, love. Later, with nothing at stake, I'd look at a jug, and make excuses for love, recall the meal, hideous smiling, how he didn't talk to me and how Mildred did. I'd argue, between me and her, had loomed the shape of a foreign penis. His moon. My motive. I'd recall the job, my own penis, and I'd raise the distinction between men and women. Men do what they have to do. A woman can do anything a man can do, but does she have to do it? Mrs. Stanger didn't have to open the door. I stepped through it into another world. The enemy of Freud, son of Marx, Phillip Liebowitz, plunging beyond analysis in the wake of a shark.

2

The walls bore guns, horse whips, heads of gazelle, buffalo, giraffe and photos of Stanger amid naked blacks and guns. Dead animals lay at his feet. Mrs. Stanger locked the door and turned with her shoes kicked off, standing shorter, flat-footed, loose in arm and shoulder, her chin up to give me a level glance from slits. Her expression in face and body seemed to say, go on, look, Mr. Liebowitz, I'm without my shoes and no less terrific. There was a dull lamp in a corner of the room. Its light mixed delicate oils for metal and a breath of leather. She advanced in it slowly, her face darkening, the slits shining. She said, "Don't you dare fuck me." We used the back of a brown bear. Her face beneath mine, in a field of bristle, opened as she opened and opened. Her hands slid up my back, then up through her hair. Rings clicked on bear teeth. She fingered the fangs until they were bloody, then lay still and silent, perfectly flat, showing the indifference and ease of a woman who is proud of her body. I dressed. When I stood over her she said, "Poor me. See the booboo. Lick the booboo, Mr. Liebowitz." I kneeled. She fed me fingers. I licked. The mute choir of staring animals, fifty Mr. Stangers, naked blacks, instruments of pain and annihilation, the dull light intimating the circles of her breasts, white shield of her belly, thickening of hair and shadow at the conflation of thighs and greater labia, were in my mouth. I swallowed.

3

The party had mounted its preclimactic moment, music booming, blacks winding about wheeling carts of ice, glasses, and bottles. I felt the general tension that precedes both success and failure. All could decline into scattered and desultory chitchat or fly toward community. Two men, stripped to the waist, were fighting in a corner. Some guests made a circle about them. Most were dancing, or talking in groups. I returned to the chair I had been sitting in. Black hands fixed me a bourbon of yellow, kickling ice. Through it I watched Stanger and Mildred, the intense, wishy-washy figures of an erotic urn which evokes the prick of infinite perpetuity. Blows, grunts, incoherent curses, spiced with squeals from spectators, filled gaps in the music. The ambience was dense, rude, various flow. Blacks in tuxedos; hard black rock; whites chatting, slugging, or dancing the

inventions of black kids in ghettos. Thinking was impossible without the force of feeling; I couldn't have added two and two unless driven through the motions by hatred or an equivalent passion; I couldn't have read a paragraph of Austen or James unless I shrieked each word. Mrs. Stanger had remained behind to wash. I had nothing to do but sit, feel the life, watch Stanger and Mildred, drink my bourbon. Then a big, wild lady plopped into Mrs. Stanger's chair. Her dress was channeled to discover tits, her talk was electrified by the topics of slick magazines—decadent New York, divorce, and the problems so many had these days with kids. She mentioned grass-raps, politics, syphilis, and runaways, and then said, "I used to play kissing games, but, today, a kid spots a hair on his crotch and runs right out to fuck." She waited for my comment. I grinned agreement. Between her tits the stream of little hair was bleached. Her particular kid, she said, making a bomb, had blown out his eye. "Blew it out," she sneered, as if amazed at his incompetence. My head shook sympathetically while it supposed, inside, that along with the tiger haunted by former ass and thigh, you throw in first-class eats, marijuana, servants, and the job, say twenty thousand. "Blew it out," she repeated, apparently encouraging me to say something. I tried for a sexual-philosophical tone. "There is nothing left not to do, is there?" She looked puzzled and annoyed, as if, despite her blatant tits and endless mouth, she hated double messages. "I mean, you know, make bombs. Fuck. What have you." The men fighting had begun to shout. One claimed the other had kicked him in the balls, which was against the rules. Soon the blows were thicker and louder. The tits laughed, then slapped her hand lightly on my face and gave it a little push, the way one responds to a naughty child with affectionate repudiation. "You're a gas," she said, her hand lingering for a moment on my lips, but, sensing a prior claim, she withdrew it. Mrs. Stanger had appeared and stood looking down at us. I tried to keep the tits sitting by turning my back slightly to Mrs. Stanger. But the tits, unnerved by her presence, rose from the chair and turned her ass to me, as though to display another pair of tits in departure. Mrs. Stanger reassumed her chair. I leaned toward her in humble admiration and squeezed her knee. "I wanna marijuana, Mrs. Stanger."

"You might begin calling me Nell. Why do you want a marijuana? Didn't you like fucking me?"

Her expression was imperious. Her voice was irascible.

"I don't see the connection."

"There is one. Answer my question, Phillip. Didn't you like it?"

"I didn't like it, Nell."

"Are you being moral?"

"My only luxury."

"It's the luxury of poor, sad, uneducated people. I liked it very much. Perhaps you're more fussy than moral."

She made an amused eyebrow and leaned back in the theater of great class.

"I'm sure my husband may give you the job."

I forgot that she wheezed and didn't sweat right, and she saw something like that in my face. Fresh color leaped into her bronze, as if toward a gift I held. She was ready again. So was I, but I didn't move. I couldn't predict tomorrow's feelings if I allowed no forbearance. A man needn't be immoral to know that much. He feels things. Her hand on mine. We stood up together. Pretending to dance we drifted toward the zoo, both of us quivering with the nastiness of our exchange. Sobs issued from the corner. Blows persisted. She said, "One of those chaps is a plastic surgeon."

"Which one?"

I asked the question in a quiet, natural voice, just like hers, to seem as ready as she for anything, even conversational drivel. And I turned her slightly to face the corner. "Which one?"

"The bigger one. His name is Swoon. I'll introduce you to him later, if you like. I've never seen him at a party where he doesn't get into a fight."

"You've invited him here before?"

"Oh, God, yes, about fifty times. You and your wife are the only ones who've never been here before. He killed a man in that corner. February. Yes, it was February."

"Curious name."

"Silly. I mean he killed him in February."

She kissed my check. Stanger and Mildred receded through hair, vapors of perfume, alcohol, and cigarettes, immobilized, begging for trouble. In the zoo I buggered Nell. She saw smears, said, "Shit," and ran off to change.

4

Nothing definite had been said about the job, but I felt I was doing all right. Swoon, on the other hand, was down, spinning on his back while the other man, with pointed shoes, kicked him in the face, skipped away, stopped, kicked him in the face again and skipped away. Beside me, a lady with bulging eyes and tendons scoring her neck, shouted, "Get up, Jack, get up. Get up, you fairy." Beyond the fight, through agitations of dancing couples, I saw his hand on her thigh. She offered semiparted lips, lick of bare leg, pure neck and arm, and inflexible attention to whatever he said. She was lovely all in all. To me, a stranger. I'd have fucked her myself, though the idea seemed unnatural. She was mother of my child, not lady of this glory. However unnatural, I admitted that she was the best-looking woman in the room and I wanted her and envied her, and I wondered how long before I was homosexual by circumstance. "Didn't you want me to do it, Phillip?" That they hadn't once left the couch seemed proof they felt something. "I did it for your job."

"That's a lie. I don't want to hear your lies. Just tell me if you liked it."

"He was revolting. He's an old man."

"That means you liked it."

Swoon suddenly seized the dancer's crotch and dragged himself up through seven or eight punches in the face. The move was brilliant and courageous and I found myself shouting with the lady beside me and several others. "Go, baby. Kill. Kill. Kill." A voice hissed into my ear, "Devil." In another dress, another degree of fresher, whiter person, Nell smiled, then pinched at my kidney, twisting and screwing the flesh until I thrust an elbow into her abdomen. I giggled and tried not to look at the fight or across the room at dirty Mildred. To my lack of focus, giggles, and shifting, Nell responded. "The toilet is that way." I said, "Thanks," wondering if I had to piss. She smiled, and her smile deepened, taking knowledge of her devil into places she'd taken the man. She knew him, this devil: he had to piss. In fact he didn't, but he smiled, too, at her periodontal plastic, pink, low in the gleaming tooth. As I started away she grabbed my elbow.

"Tell me one thing before you go."

The fighting and the music were loud. I gave her a steady, deaf look.

"I said I want you to tell me one thing before you go."

She didn't stop smiling.

"It was all right, Nell."

"But?"

I waited to see what she made of nothing.

Her smile strained as if tugged by waters. "You'd like to beat me, wouldn't you? I think you'd like to beat me. Wouldn't you, Phillip?"

I winked.

The other man went down. Swoon was grinding a heel into his neck. He'd been invited here fifty times. People were cheering, calling his name. "Jack. Jack." That was love, waves of love. Nell clasped her hands on her breast and jumped up and down like a child. "Oh, kill, kill," she said. "Make him be dead." I left the room.

5

Like a child, a little girl, and yet her exquisite jumping epitomized the party, spoke for the fighting men, all the others, too, even the servants. They served, they danced, and fought for the lady in white and gold of the symmetrical face. The spot where she pinched me seemed to be burning a message into my kidney. Her crowd wasn't made up of phonics. Between desire and action they interposed no mask. Impulse didn't twist into perversion, into games. They were whole, straight, noble creatures, slave and master. To me, the challenge they represented left no alternatives. Maybe Stanger and Mildred had seen to that, but now I was glad that I'd made the first deadly stroke, going to the zoo with Nell and killing Mildred as surely as Stanger killed giraffes. I could imagine him on the veldt, in a crowd of naked blacks who hand him gun after gun, begging him to shoot straight as the giraffe charges, bearing down with tooth and hoof. Great, but I'd buggered his wife. Before, I'd wanted the job. Now, I could not *not* have it, and something definite had to be said tonight. Yes or no. Either answer would be a comment on myself. The only one I cared to hear. Yes or no. Before the evening was over I'd be purged of irony. Made clean. Hired. Or a simple schmuck. I'd

walked off in the direction indicated by Nell. My step was light. Too light, nearly wraithlike in the spacious, winding substance of this apartment. It made me feel weak and sick, the apartment, the creepy trivial way I walked in it. Like a man looking for his own pathetic step on a huge ship at sea. A man who has never seen or felt a high sea, never learned to walk with its long surge, its remorseless drag and lunge. I needed this moment away from the blazing, loud incoherence of the crowded land, alone, out of sight, to practice walking. And my feelings, while practicing, were like those of a young captain in a novel by Conrad. His first opportunity to command. He is alone, pacing the deck, getting a sense of himself. A storm is rising quickly on the horizon. Some members of the crew try to call it to his attention, but he has already noticed it, and seen through it to himself. He is sympathetic to their fears, yet more sympathetic to his own. Could I get at that sense of myself required by this storm? I notice it's a moral storm. The worst kind. I know the ship is fraught with goods, and they are meant for the best people. Could I bring it home intact? Was I the captain? I tried to walk right. One, two, three, six, fifteen. . . . It wasn't easy to walk right. But no prerequisite of honor is easy. I was afraid I might kick a jug, scratch a painting, the way I walked, like a crazy, spastic, stoned, drunken gawk. Not a captain. I might even fall off the whole fucking ship. But then, God knows why, I felt it begin: one, two, three, four. . . . I was walking, and all right. I was the captain. One, two, three, here comes Captain Zombie.

6

A hallway led to hallways, to rooms opening into rooms, a labyrinth, a weight of money, accumulating in vistas of paintings, etchings, hanging rugs, pewter, throbbing lacquers, silver, gold. Touch these good things, I thought. Let sublimation steel you. Touch. Let lech. Love any hole that feels. I smacked a door, both hands flat to spare me a broken nose, and fell through it onto my face. I looked up minutes later and saw a girl at a dressing table. Her back was to me. She was brushing long brown hair, like the household genie of serene indifference. She didn't seem to know or care that I was in the room. I lay on the floor watching her. She spoke:

"Please don't apologize for being late and slamming through my

door like the gross, offensive pig you happen to be. I much prefer your silence. Any apology now would make me exceedingly furious. I'm not exceedingly furious now, Colin. So keep your mouth shut. I suppose you haven't shaved, have you? I won't hear your apologies. I won't hear your voice."

She clapped the brush down. Her legs lashed by my face, her negligee flying, to the bed. Books and papers were knocked off the bed. I stood up. She flung herself onto the bed, twisted onto her back, eyes shut, forehead writhing with contradiction. She gave a blind, shrill order to the ceiling:

"Go on, Colin, you know what I want."

Lest he'd forgotten her legs struck out, stiff, isoscelean. I saw voluted conch in wire tangle, the picture of her mind. Given its assumption, the Colin in me rose, perked up like a rat, snout quivering, pointing at the answer to a question never asked. Life is this epitome. Red, tidal maw. Yawn. Aching exfoliant. Hole. I flicked light, shut door, three steps, and I straddled her neck. "Smells," she cried, and muddy flux dragged me, gripping my head, churning circles into the circles of her need, the cherished head which she recognized — "Hey, who you?" — as not the right head. A good one nonetheless, already thinking how to apologize. She screeched and kicked. I pressed on to suggest the powerful suction of feeling, but, thinking, thinking, I felt only ideas, tones, and tropes rise upon one another like waves, curling, crashing, failing to hold, sliding faster and faster down the beach to the seething, shapeless inane. Remember the job, I thought — think — and a hairy hemp ripped from my liver to my throat. I came at both ends simultaneously. Apology was impossible. I opted for vigor. "Fantastic," I cried, hoping thus to distract her with vigor. Also oblique flattery. She said, "EEE," scrambling to one end of the bed, and me to the other, pleading now, "Don't scream. I'm turning on the light." It discovered her biting the sheet. "Woo woo woo," she said. I bent, pleading in the harmless posture of a dog at stool. "Didn't you like it?" She twisted about to slap the night table. I expected a gun. She twisted back with glasses on her face, big eyes, the tigerish mother apparent. "Say, you're Nell Stanger's kid, aren't you?" My voice was eager, genial. She screamed. I fled.

7

Turn after turn after turn with streaming chair and rug and jug. Then I whipped into the last hall, kicked into high for the heart bursting straight away and the person — shortish, bald, dark suit, bow tie, drink in his chubby grip — was standing there, like the eternal child who plays in the road before the speeding Ferrari, or the peasant lifting a slow, clotted, laborious face to a thunder of horses and hounds, but, this person, this particular incarnation of the enduring common denominator, leaned toward a painting, touching, smelling, wallowing in the color and texture of converging neural streams which filled the airy delta between himself and better life on the wall, and he was unaware of me running, a whole man running, legs, arms, head running, stomach, knees, balls running, and he still savored the painted dream as he looked up into the oncoming real, the drink warm in his forgotten fist, all of him growing big, bigger in my eyes, a face looking up with no intention, no expectation of anything, and, before his eyebrows fully elevated, eyes fully opened, and pulpy, sluggish lip curled fully away from his stained teeth, my hands struck his neck and, behind me, was the faint thud and the empty rumble of a rolling glass.

8

I reentered the drawing room with expanded lungs and heat in my eyes. Couples were still dancing, others sprawled. Nobody watched Swoon and the other man, lugubrious with exhaustion, flailing in slow arcs, rarely hitting. Rancid breath lay in the torpid, festering air. Screams came from the distance, but no cigarette was put out or drink lowered. Between me and the couch, where Stanger and Mildred sat necking, there was a forest of shifting fashions, the black tuxedos, and the clothing of the guests, bright pinks, greens, blues, and yellows that cried out for the pleasures of robust middle age. It hummed everywhere with the omnivorous conversation of a dying party that insisted on living. Nell stepped out of it and said, "Let's dance," her voice grim, as if dancing were war, but also, it seemed, her voice had an undercurrent of something particular to say. Instant-

ly, I became a dancing fool. She danced me off to the zoo and said it.

"Undress."

Her clothes were already a heap of white, pink, and gold, and she sprawled on the bear, its fangs encrusted, shining blood. Her limbs cast out in the languid shape of her mood, suggesting nets. Her voice was now soft, yet coarse in tone. "Get it, Phillip. On the shelf in the closet."

Still in my shirt and tie I trotted to the closet to get it, whatever it was. On a shelf about chest high lay three hundred sausages coiled in the convoluted complications of a monster brain. A long gray chain made of iron. The prospect of such appetite suffused me with feelings of poverty, no education, and moral shock, but in one clean, swift movement of self-disgust I laid on hands like he who knows. The chain chuckled as my fingers pierced its holes. I pulled. It came slowly, heavily, as though each link stirred from sleep, and then too heavily, gaining speed, personal will and clamor, a raging snake of cannon balls pouring through my hands to bury my feet, shins, knees. Writhing, arms out, I was half-man-half-bonsai tree with impoverished roots, strangled in its springs, sucking denial. "I hate pain," I screamed, giving up all reserve. Nell bobbed up off the bear. She seized the chain and tugged. I pummeled the top of her head. For real, not in a sexual way. She said, "Quit that." I shouted sincerely, "I hate pain. I'll beat your head off," and continued pummeling. She lugged with steady, patient strength; the motion of serious, honest work which, in different conditions, I'd have considered beautiful; her naked, multi-dimpled back, rippling, wheezing, heaving spine against iron as I beat the measures of her lugging into her head and shouted my refrain. At last I fell free and could properly convulse, and she rolled onto me and tried to soothe me with motherly tongue, breasts, and holes, but something had happened to make me unreceptive and inconsolable, as if my body, in trauma, had shaken free of my mind, and now my eyes, my very flesh in every place retreated, fleeing toward the murdered buffalo, gazelle, and giraffe. "That," I gasped, "rub with that." And she, too, seemed unselved, brained, as she rose and stumbled across the room to grab the giraffe by the nostrils and tear it off the wall. Then she returned and kneeled and rubbed its eyes and great slop of lip carefully, gently, against my face and neck, and then back and forth between my legs until I

felt better. I dressed rapidly as she stared, sitting on the floor beside the giraffe, a limp, naked, stupid woman. I let myself think of her that way, and I said, "Get dressed, woman." Immediately she crawled to the heap of clothing and clawed out her underpants. I left for the drawing room. Not once had I struck her in a deliberate and evil way. I thought of that as I limped down the hall, and I felt myself ringing like a bell that calls men from this world. For the first time that evening, if not for the first time in my life, in doing nothing, I'd done tremendously. Though nothing definite had been said, I knew the job was mine, because it was inconceivable that it wasn't mine. I hadn't hit her. I hadn't even wanted to. In the force of not wanting, I'd made the job mine. This wasn't magical thinking. This was true; or the world was chaos and less than hell. Nevertheless, I was prepared to accept a word or a strong hint. I didn't need legal forms, a ten-page contract, sixteen carbons. I intended to approach Stanger now. The confrontation would be his chance to talk, not mine. I had the job. He had only, for his salvation, for the sake of future goodwill, to confirm it, maybe suggest an idea of wages per annum. My limp deepened. I deepened it. Hard, good lunge. Dragging foot. An arm hooked back for balance, for the feel of bad damage swinging itself, dragging, lunging down the hall. What rough beast? What rough beast, indeed.

9

Suddenly the hallway didn't look familiar. I'd taken a wrong turn, perhaps two, but there was a door. It had no knob, a swinging door. I shoved it wide. Something registered and, just as quickly, it was gone, wiped out, retrogressively unseen. I was back in the hall again, the door was shut, and I was about to continue lunging on to the next door, the next turn, when I realized I'd fallen into my old ways, protecting myself, letting myself believe there were things one musn't see. I'd been through that, I'd seen, transcended. I could see anything now, see it squarely and name it with clarity, exactitude, and perfect indifference. I shoved the door again. It opened on a brilliant kitchen, a long counter with a tall, steel coffee urn. I'd seen that. The black servant stood on the counter beside the urn. That, too. Pissing into the urn. Yes, yes; that, too. He wore sunglasses as if to shield his eyes against the glare of his yam. "That's offensive," I said, naming it. He shook his last drops into the urn, then hopped

off the counter, zipped up and began putting cups and saucers on a tray. When he finished he turned to me and said, "We're born offensive, brother." He then stepped toward me, his hand extended, palm up. "Give me some skin, brother." The flat, gleaming opacity of his sunglasses seemed menacing, but I lunged to meet him and drew my palm down the length of his, and then we locked thumbs, and pressed forearms and elbows together. He was all right, but, boiling in me now was a phrase for Mildred: "Don't drink the coffee." I returned to the drawing room with it, and then, in the weariness of this crowd, I felt it dissolve into the quiet voice of a Britisher, like head boy at school for super-sadists, fashioning managerial scum for the colonies: "Mildred, get your coat." Terribly mild, and yet the pitch of majestic will. She and Stanger were locked, pretzled together, still necking, and his hand was plunged beneath her dress, but she wiggled hard, slapped knees together and sprang up. Suddenly, my wife! He sprang up behind her. There were people everywhere, some standing just behind their couch, others sprawled at their feet, and yet only I could invade their privacy, only I had the peculiar power of invasion attributed ordinarily to voyeurs and God. The power against which society makes laws, or out of which it claims to draw them. Now there was stir all about the room. My power seemed to have spread, initiating small spasms, like a wind seen in the motion of trees. And Nell appeared, the hostess again, cooing goodnights and sogoodyou's, and she smiled at me in a frowning, quizzical, sad, not miserable way. I read her lips: "Coffee?" Thus, encouraging me to stay a bit after the others. I smiled regrets and waved a lyrical goodbye. From the depths, dimly, mechanically, came *EEE* and some of the guests who seemed to hear it tried to look worried.

10

We left the apartment with Dr. and Mrs. Swoon, and Stanger walked us out to the elevator. Dr. Swoon was in his clothes again. Mrs. Swoon; it turned out, was the lady with the bulging eyes and violent neck. Swoon's face was splotted with pimento color and torn, but, somewhere behind it he seemed to have withdrawn into silent, severe dignity. Mrs. Swoon chattered as if it had been she who'd done the fighting and could find no way of containing its

momentum. "You should have gone for the eyes, Jack. Your plan was no good. It never is when you don't listen to people. I mean you use diagnosticians, don't you, before you operate?" She turned to me and said, "Two of them. Jack has two young doctors who see the patient and tell Jack what to do. They're awfully clever, but their hands are made of shit, you know what I mean. Jack operates. Of course, without them, he couldn't tell the difference between an asshole and an elbow. I mean he'd have to consult the nurses to find out which was which. But once he knows, look out, look out, that's Jack Swoon, king of fingers. He never uses a knife on nose jobs. Do you, Jack?" He shook his head no. "Does them with his bare hands, fingers and the heels of his palms. This is the heel. See, this part. He gets it smack up against the nares and grinds. Makes nice little ski jumps everytime. 'I make the whole world gentile,' says Jack. Personally, I think it leaves the holes too big, but that's what folks want." Stanger chuckled and raised a voice to obscure hers, and also the screaming which had followed us out to the elevator. "Didn't somehow find a chance to talk to you, Phillip, and get to know you. But I haven't forgotten our interview." His thumb ground the elevator button as if it were an eyeball. "We'll get together soon. You must promise me that." Sufficient, I thought. Enough said. He had dark, protruding eyes and a feeble mouth. His expression was overbred, full of difficulties, as if he remembered something in his chemical history, not finished, far away. An animal, perhaps, still to shoot. His handshake was tentative, trying to close on a good-humored assurance. Mine was a quick, updown fuckyou. "I promise. Goodnight and thanks." He then nodded to Mildred and they said goodnight as the elevator door opened. Then he shook hands with the Swoons and we stepped into the elevator. As the door slid shut he turned away. The door stuck, by the grace of *deus ex machina*, just for an instant, to show Stanger from behind, the right buttock in his fist, pulled away from its brother. An abstracted, habitual gesture, expressive of long familiarity with the pressures of his body. He released slow, thoughtful gas, a final goodnight to his guests in the elevator. The door shut. Mrs. Swoon stared at it. Dr. Swoon's fiery face ripped into a great smile. I glanced at Mildred. She pinched her nose. Even thus, beautiful. The door opened, we said goodnight to the Swoons, and she took my arm. We walked wildly, bumping

hips. "I was bored, bored, bored," she cried. "Do you hear me? Bored. The screaming was worth it, maybe, but I was bored. I hope you're happy about the job. You'd have gotten it even if we stayed home. Probably a better salary, too. Did you know a man was almost beaten to death and another had a stroke while looking at a picture? I wish I'd seen that picture. Must have been very dirty, don't you think?"

"He named a figure?"

"You imagine I asked?"

"Of course you asked."

"Eleven and a half to start."

"Bullshit. How much?"

"He said his daughter, Naomi, wants to be an actress. He calls her Nimi. Maybe it was Ninny screaming, rehearsing some part."

"How much? Don't prattle."

"He said she has a neurological problem. Theater is so good for her. 'So good for Nimi,' he said. He meant she is a crazy loony, right?"

"Who cares? How much?"

"The wife is very good-looking, but sort of a dopey slut, wouldn't you say? Wouldn't you say that, Phillip? He's a weakling. I'm sure you'll like the job, Phillip. You know what he told me?"

"What did he tell you?"

"He told me he hates the sound of eating, even the sound he makes. So he has these big dinner parties, see? Are you limping, Phillip?"

"Yeah."

"And he's got a scheme for buying property on the moon. Because of the blacks, not to make money. He's in lumber and publishing. He doesn't need money. There's a family place in Connecticut to which we've been invited, and another one in California. But the moon, man, is where it's really at. 'Nowhere else to go,' he said. 'What do you think NASA is all about? Space Agency? No, sir. Surreal Estate Agency.' No blacks on the moon, Phillip. He thinks New York is finished. Phones don't work. Blacks everywhere. But he hires black servants. What do you think that means, Phillip? He wants to keep an eye on them? Please stop that damn limping and walk more quickly."

"What the hell does he mean by eleven and a half? I'm no typist."

"Stop crying. I can't stand the sight of you crying."

"I'm not crying."

"Yes, you are. I'm tired. Let's take a cab all the way home. We can afford it. He said twenty-five. With his paw on my ass, he says, twenty-five. 'Twenty-five, dear.' Jealous? Mrs. Stanger digs you. You should fuck her or something, if you haven't already. I hate you."

"You acted badly. Stop crying."

"I'm sorry I acted badly. There's a cab. Kiss me. Tomorrow I'll buy three pairs of shoes."

I kissed her in the cab, then asked, "Did you like Stanger's paw on your ass?"

"I liked the way you told me to get my coat in front of everybody. But if you ever do that when we're with human beings, Phillip, I'll do something you won't forget. Twenty-five. Hee hee."

"Yeah. Yeah. Yeah."

11

The cab went west to Fifth Avenue, then north, then west through Central Park. The trees, lacerated by lights, seemed to fly into the cab and about our heads, and Mildred leaned back, giving herself to the trees and to me, and her pants tangled on ankle, but I couldn't get it out of mind and up again for naked traffic until she whispered, sliding down to the floor, whispering, "Twenty-five," into my crotch, and saying, "Kootchie kootchie." Then, at our place, the driver waited, a head on a leather jacket, with smoke sliding and twining up like hair from his invisible cigarette, and the whole cab shuddering in idle. His photo looked down at us in the back, smiling, Nunzio Salazar, machismo-fascismo moustache, number 999327, approves of it, and then Mildred's legs seemed to lift from my ribs like wings, and she said, "Oh," and came. I was satisfied. A sentimental man prefers happiness to truth. And I did prefer it. Her dear, lovely cheek on my shoulder, and the fingering of my lank silk as I fingered sticky leaves, peeling away singles for the fare, then twice as many for the tip. Mildred jerked. "Don't be a fool. We live in this town." Half as many for the tip.

THE NATIONAL INTEREST AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS

EDITORS' NOTE: *The views expressed by Noam Chomsky and Hans Morgenthau were presented at a PR evening this spring, one of a series called Conversations and Confrontations the magazine's been running at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. No formal papers were presented — the piece by Mr. Chomsky published here is a shortened version of a more detailed study of the Pentagon Papers and is the basis for his remarks that evening; Mr. Morgenthau's comments, and the questions and answers that follow, are from the transcript of portions of the discussion.*

Noam Chomsky

The Pentagon Papers generally corroborate, I believe, several analyses of long-term U.S. objectives based on the public record. In the early period, the documentary record presents a fairly explicit account of more or less rational pursuit of perceived self-interest. The United States has strategic and economic interests in Southeast Asia that must be secured. Holding Indochina is essential to securing these interests. Therefore we must hold Indochina. A critical consideration is Japan, which will eventually accommodate to the "Soviet Bloc" if Southeast Asia is lost. In effect, then, the United States would have lost the Pacific phase of World War II, which was fought, in part, to prevent Japan from constructing a closed "co-prosperity sphere" in Asia from which the United States would be excluded. The theoretical framework for these considerations was the domino theory, which was formulated clearly before the Korean War, as was the decision to support French colonialism. The goal: a new "co-prosperity sphere" congenial to United States interests and incorporating Japan.

It is fashionable today to deride the domino theory, but in fact it contains a kernel of plausibility, perhaps of truth. National independence and revolutionary social change, if successful, may very

well be contagious. The problem is what Walt Rostow and others sometimes call the “ideological threat,” specifically, “the possibility that the Chinese Communists can prove to Asians by progress in China that Communist methods are better and faster than democratic methods.” The State Department feared that “a fundamental source of danger we face in the Far East derives from Communist China’s rate of economic growth which will probably continue to outstrip that of free Asian countries, with the possible exception of Japan,” a matter of real as well as psychological impact elsewhere.¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff repeated the same wording two weeks later (*DOD*, book 10, 1213), adding further that “the dramatic economic improvements realized by Communist China over the past ten years impress the nations of the region greatly and offer a serious challenge to the Free World” (1226). The State Department therefore urged that the United States do what it can to retard the economic progress of the Communist Asian States (1208), a decision that is remarkable in its cruelty.

A few years later, in the midst of the fall 1964 planning to escalate the war, Michael Forrestal pointed out that we must be concerned with Chinese “ideological expansion,” its need “to achieve ideological successes abroad” and the danger that any such ideological success will stimulate the need for further successes. Therefore “our objective should be to ‘contain’ China for the longest possible period”;² or, as the analyst puts it a bit more accurately, paraphrasing Forrestal, “the U.S. object should be to ‘contain’ Chinese political and ideological influence” (III, 218). William Sullivan picked up the same theme, viewing “Chinese political and ideological aggressiveness . . . as a threat to the ability of these peoples to determine their own futures, and hence to develop along ways compatible with United States interests” (*ibid.*, analyst’s paraphrase).

Note the typical assumption that self-determination is equivalent to United States interest, an assumption that is more than usually

1 *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 10, 1198; June 1959: the government offset edition of the Pentagon Papers. All *DOD* references are from this edition.

2 *Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of U.S. Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, Beacon Press, 1971, III, 592; November 4, 1964. References hereafter are to this edition except where otherwise noted.

insipid in the light of what the Pentagon Papers reveal about the actual United States response to Vietnamese efforts at self-determination. The same assumption, in effect, appeared much earlier in an important State Department Policy Statement of September 1948 (*DOD*, book 8, 143-149), which took note of "our inability to suggest any practicable solution of the Indochina problem." This inability arose from the incompatibility of our long-term objectives with certain unpleasant facts. One long-term objective is to eliminate so far as possible Communist influence and to prevent Chinese influence, and "the unpleasant fact [is] that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution which excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome." What is particularly interesting is the reason why we must "prevent undue Chinese penetration and subsequent influence in Indochina." The reason is "so that the peoples of Indochina will not be hampered in their natural developments by the pressure of an alien people and alien interests."

This laudable concern for the "natural developments" of the people of Indochina, free from alien interests, is coupled with the statement of another long-term objective of U.S. policy: "to see installed a self-governing nationalist state which will be friendly to the United States and which . . . will be patterned upon our conception of a democratic state," and will be associated "with the western powers, particularly with France with whose customs, language and laws [the peoples of Indochina] are familiar, to the end that those peoples will prefer freely to cooperate with the western powers culturally, economically and politically" and will "work productively and thus contribute to a better balanced world economy," while enjoying a rising standard of income. The United States and France, in short, do not constitute "alien people and alien interests" so far as the peoples of Indochina are concerned, and association with them does not hamper "natural developments."

The National Security Council Working Group of November 1964, in discussing the domino theory, pointed out the danger that mainland Southeast Asia might fall to Communist domination if South Vietnam does, noting that "if either Thailand or Malaysia were lost, or went badly sour in any way, then the rot would be in real danger of spreading all over mainland Southeast Asia" (III, 627). Shortly after, William Bundy and John McNaughton noted that if

a "Vietnamese-negotiated deal" led to a unified Communist Vietnam, hostile to Communist China and limiting its ambitions to Laos and Cambodia (the "most likely result" of the least aggressive option they were considering), then "whether the rot spread to Thailand would be hard to judge." It would, however, be "likely that the Thai . . . would accommodate somehow to Communist China even without any marked military move by Communist China" (III, 661). The "rot" in these cases is, surely, the "ideological threat." Recall that in this period there was much talk of a competition between the Chinese and Indian models of development. In this context, fear of Chinese "ideological expansion" gave substance to the domino theory, quite apart from any fantasies about Chinese troops roaming at will through northern Thailand or Kremlin-directed aggression by the Viet Minh.

It is important to be clear about what is at stake in discussion of the domino theory and related matters. The reality of perceived "dangers" is, of course, irrelevant to determining the motivation of policy-makers. The fact that threats were perceived and taken seriously suffices to establish a motive. The question of the reality of the threats is nevertheless of interest, for a different reason. If in fact a failure of intelligence or knowledge led to the perception of imaginary dangers, as is often alleged, then policy could be "improved" (for whose benefit, is another question) by replacing the policy-makers by others who are more rational and knowledgeable. The issues are sometimes not kept separate, with much resulting confusion.

Perhaps the threat has now diminished, with the vast destruction in South Vietnam and the hatreds and social disruption caused by the American war. It may be, then, that Vietnam can be lost to the Vietnamese without the dire consequence of rapid social and economic progress. Perhaps the "second line of defense" of which United States planners spoke can be held, at least for a time.

If our friends—Diem, Chiang, Sarit and Ayub, in 1961—were toppled by popular movements, perhaps ultimately leading Japan to realign, influencing India, affecting even the oil-rich Middle East and then Europe, as the domino theory postulated, there would be a serious impact on the global system dominated by the United States and U.S.-based international corporations. Although some of the formulations of the domino theory were indeed fantastic, the underlying concept was no fantasy. Correspondingly, it comes as

no surprise to discover that it is rarely challenged in this record. The analyst regards support for the French against Ho Chi Minh as "the path of prudence rather than the path of risk"; it "seemed the wiser choice," given the likelihood that all of Southeast Asia might have fallen under Ho's leadership (obviously not by military conquest, say, in Indonesia). This he regards as "only slightly less of a bad dream than what has happened to Vietnam since" (I, 52). The domino principle, he notes, "was at the root of U.S. policy" since Chiang's defeat. It was also at the root of French policy, though the dominoes they were concerned with were in North Africa (I, 54). The theory was firmly reiterated by McGeorge Bundy in mid-1967 (IV, 159) and by others, repeatedly.

In the years between, there is debate only over timing and probability. A CIA analysis of June 1964 has frequently been described as a challenge to the validity of the domino theory. However, this analysis (III, 178) merely states that the surrounding nations probably would not "*quickly* succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam" (italics mine) and the spread of communism would not be "inexorable" and might be reversed, though the loss of South Vietnam and Laos "would be profoundly damaging to the U.S. position in the Far East," and might encourage the "militant policies" of Hanoi and Peking.

The documentation for the pre-Kennedy period gives substantial support to this interpretation of U.S. motives. By April 1945, the United States had publicly supported the reconstitution of French authority, somewhat evasively, though a "more liberal" pattern, specifically, "liberalization of restrictive French economic policies," was recommended "for the protection of American interests" (DOD, book 8, 6-10). The U.S. interest in Indochina ("almost exclusively a French economic preserve, and a political morass") was considerably less than in Indonesia, where "extensive American and British investments . . . afforded common ground for intervention" (I, 29). It was urged that France move to grant autonomy to its colonies (or the people "may embrace ideologies contrary to our own or develop a Pan-Asiatic movement against all Western powers") and that open door policies be pursued (DOD, book 8, 23). By December 1946, it was noted that "French appear to realize no longer possible maintain closed door here and non-French interests will have chance to participate in unquestioned rich economic possibilities"

(*ibid.*, 87). Although the resources of Indochina itself are repeatedly mentioned (*e.g.*, *ibid.*, 183), it was of course the whole region (on the hypothesis of the domino theory) that was the primary consideration: "if COMMIES gain control IC, THAI and rest SEA will be imperiled" (*ibid.*, 220; June 1949).

A National Security Council report of December 1949 went into the situation in some detail (NSC 48/1, *ibid.*, 226f.). The problem is that now and for the foreseeable future, the USSR threatens to dominate Asia, an area of significant political, economic and military power. The "Stalinist bloc" might achieve global dominance if Japan, "the principal component of a Far Eastern war-making complex," were added to it. "Whether [Japan's] potential is developed and the way in which it is used will strongly influence the future patterns of politics in Asia." "In the power potential of Asia, Japan plays the most important part" by reason of its economic potential and strategic position. "The industrial plant of Japan would be the richest strategic prize in the Far East for the USSR." Communist pressure on Japan will mount, because of proximity, the indigenous Japanese Communist movement which might be able to exploit cultural factors and economic hardship, and "the potential of Communist China as a source of raw materials vital to Japan and a market for its goods." Japan requires Asian food, raw materials and markets; the United States should encourage "a considerable increase in Southern Asiatic food and raw material exports" to avoid "preponderant dependence on Chinese sources." Analogous considerations hold for India. Furthermore, these markets and sources of raw materials should be developed for U.S. purposes. "Some kind of regional association . . . among the non-Communist countries of Asia might become an important means of developing a favorable atmosphere for such trade among themselves and with other parts of the world."

Under certain restrictions, trade with Communist China should be permitted, for the health of the Japanese and U.S. economies. The industrial plant of Japan and such strategic materials as Indonesian oil must be denied to the USSR, and kept in the Western orbit. The particular problem in Southeast Asia is that it "is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin" (this is "now clear"), and has no responsible leaders, outside of Thailand and the Philippines. If Southeast Asia "is swept by communism we

shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia."

The general lines of this analysis persist through the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. NSC/64 (I, 361f.) concluded that Thailand and Burma would "fall under Communist domination" and the rest of Southeast Asia would be "in grave hazard," if Indochina were "controlled by a Communist-dominated government." The Joint Chiefs urged "long-term measures to provide for Japan and the other offshore islands a secure source of food and other strategic materials from non-Communist held areas in the Far East" (I, 366, April 1950; they also recommended military aid and covert operations). A State Department Policy Committee interpreted NSC/64 as asserting that "the loss of Indochina to Communist forces would undoubtedly lead to the loss of Southeast Asia" (*DOD*, book 8, 351; October 1950). NSC 48/5 saw the USSR as attempting to bring the mainland of East Asia and eventually Japan under Soviet control (May 1951; 425f.). Given Asian population, military capacity, critical resources and Japanese industrial capacity, it is essential to block this program. An NSC staff study of February 1952 warned that

the fall of Southeast Asia would underline the apparent economic advantages to Japan of association with the communist-dominated Asian sphere. Exclusion of Japan from trade with Southeast Asia would seriously affect the Japanese economy, and increase Japan's dependence on United States aid. In the long run the loss of Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual accommodation to the Soviet Bloc. [I, 375]

It went on to speak of the importance of Southeast Asian raw materials (*e.g.*, Indonesian oil and the significance of Malaya, the largest dollar earner of the United Kingdom, to Britain's economic recovery), and U.S. strategic interests, developing the domino theory in detail.

NSC 124/2 in June 1952 identified China as the main enemy, and gave a clear formulation of the domino theory, emphasizing again the problem of raw materials and the threat of Japanese accommodation to Communism (I, 83-4, 384f.). The same themes persist, with added and even clearer emphasis, under the Eisenhower administration. It was emphasized that Japan is the keystone of U.S.

policy and that the loss of Southeast Asia (a likely consequence of the loss of Indochina, or even Tonkin) would drive Japan to accommodation with the Communist bloc, permitting Red China (now the main culprit, though some analyses still refer to “the Soviet Communist campaign in Southeast Asia”; cf. *ibid.*, book 9, 214; January 1954) to construct a military bloc more formidable than that of Japan before World War II. The worldwide effects would be disastrous. Therefore Indochina must be saved, and its countries must be encouraged to integrate themselves into the “free world” system and to stimulate the flow of raw material resources to the free world (*e.g.*, I, 436, 438, 450, 452), Japan being the critical factor. In June 1956, John F. Kennedy gave a clear formulation of the basic thesis (as cited by Chester Cooper in *The Lost Crusade*):

Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the Keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and, obviously, Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam . . . Moreover, the independence of Free Vietnam is crucial to the free world in fields other than the military. Her economy is essential to the economy of all of Southeast Asia; and her political liberty is an inspiration to those seeking to obtain or maintain their liberty in all parts of Asia — and indeed the world. The fundamental tenets of this nation’s foreign policy, in short, depend in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation.

Intelligence estimates repeated, with various nuances, the general assumptions of the domino theory (see, *e.g.*, *DOD*, book 10, 999, September 1955, for a qualified statement). NSC and JCS memoranda also elaborate the same assumptions consistently, adding also conventional proposals that the investment climate for U.S. capital be improved (*ibid.*, 1206) and that Southeast Asian countries be integrated into the free world economic system (*ibid.*, 1206, 1228, 1234, 1288).

In the 1960s, there is an increasing component of irrationalism and posturing, with much talk of psychological tests of will, humiliation, the American image, making sure that the other fellow blinks first. The latter is not without its ironic aspects. Thus the analyst regards 1961 as “a peculiarly difficult year” for the United States because of “the generally aggressive and confident posture of the Russians . . . and the generally defensive position of the Americans” (II, 21). It was, therefore, difficult to make concessions or to give

ground to the Soviets, a matter which indirectly affected Vietnam. Anything, anywhere, that “was, or could be interpreted to be a weak U.S. response, only strengthened the pressure to hold on in Vietnam.” Chester Cooper believes, however, that “Kennedy’s foreign policy stance was given an added fillip in late 1962 following his dramatic success” in the Cuban missile crisis. Vietnam then provided an opportunity to prove to Peking and Moscow that their policy of “wars of liberation” was dangerous and unpromising, and also “provided both a challenge and an opportunity to test the new doctrines” of counterinsurgency. It would appear, then, that whether the U.S. stance with respect to its great power rival is defensive or not, the determination to win in Indochina is fortified.

By early 1964, concern over the effects of the “loss” of South Vietnam reached a peak of what can perhaps properly be called “hysteria.” In the analyst’s phrase, referring to the February deliberations, “stopping Hanoi from aiding the Viet Cong virtually became equated with protecting U.S. interests against the threat of insurgency throughout the world” (III, 153). Ralph Stavins hardly exaggerates (in *Washington Plans an Aggressive War*) when he describes the “clouds on the horizon” as seen from Washington in the early 1960s: “Hanoi would overthrow Diem with a few guerrilla bands, and the United States, as a direct consequence, would be forced to retire from the arena of world politics.” Such fears were incorporated into the important National Security Agency Memorandum 288 of March 1964, which presented what the analyst calls “a classic statement of the domino theory” (III, 3). Throughout the world, it held, “the South Vietnam conflict is regarded as a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation to meet the Communist ‘war of liberation’.” Thus, purely in terms of foreign policy, the stakes are high. . . .” The memorandum stated in clear terms that “we seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam” free to accept outside — meaning American — assistance, including “police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.” And it stated that unless we can achieve this objective, “almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance” or “accommodate to Communism,” with an increased threat to India, Australia, Japan and indeed, throughout the world, given that the conflict is a “test case” (III, 50-1; II, 459-61). Although these views were modulated later on (*cf.* III, 220, 658), the essential idea of South Vietnam as a

"test case" remained and the commitment to a non-Communist South Vietnam was never modified.

Perhaps a word might be added with regard to the commonly heard argument that the costs of the Vietnam War prove that the U.S. has no imperial motives (as the costs of the Boer War prove that the British empire was a figment of the radical imagination). The costs, of course, are profits for selected segments of the American economy, in large measure. Though it is quite true that the costs of empire to the imperial society may be considerable, they are distributed over the population as a whole, while the profits flow back to special segments of the economy that are generally well represented in the formation of state policy. To the extent that this is true, an empire functions as a device for internal consolidation of power and wealth. At the same time, it provides markets, sources of raw material, a cheap labor market and investment opportunities. On the assumptions of the domino theory, the stakes in Vietnam in this regard were considerable.

Still, it might very well be true that had the costs been anticipated, the Vietnam venture would not have been undertaken. But in the real world, planners do not operate with a knowledge of ultimate costs, and cannot begin all over again if policies fail. At each point, they consider the costs and benefits of future acts. On these grounds, the Vietnam involvement might very well have seemed reasonable, within the framework of imperialist motives, though by the 1960s, with the influx to Washington of ideologists and crisis-managers, it can be argued—I think rather plausibly—that other and more irrational considerations came to predominate.

Furthermore, even now that the bill is in, the effort might be judged a moderate success for those segments of American society that have a major interest in preserving an "integrated global system" in which American capital can operate with reasonable freedom. Consider the assessment of the editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, generally committed to economic liberalism. He speaks of "the ring of success stories in East and Southeast Asia," with the Japanese economy serving as "the main factor in pulling the region together and providing the shadowy outlines of a future co-prosperity sphere . . . and neatly complement[ing]" the economies of the rest of the region.

The imperial drive that is clearly expressed in many documents

may have been blunted by the unexpected resilience and obstinacy of the Vietnamese resistance. It has, nevertheless, partially achieved its aims, though in retrospect it might be argued that other means would perhaps have been more efficacious. In general, however, it seems fair to say that the concerns of the 1950s were not unrealistic, and that the imperial policy to which they gave rise was also fairly rational, if cynical. But I emphasize again that to demonstrate the motive force of the imperial drive, it is necessary only to exhibit the concerns that guided it, not their realism.

To be sure, the imperial drive is often masked in defensive terms: it is not that we are seeking to dominate an integrated world system incorporating Japan, but rather that we must deny strategic areas to the Kremlin (or "Peiping"), thus protecting ourselves and others from their "aggression." The masters of the Russian empire affect a similar pose, no doubt with equal sincerity and with as much justification. The practice has respectable historical antecedents, and the term "security" is a conventional euphemism. The planners merely seek to guarantee the security of the nation, not the interests of dominant social classes.

There is, in fact, a sense in which the "defensive" rhetoric is appropriate. It is natural for the managers of the world's most advanced industrial superpower, organized more or less along capitalist lines, to seek free and open competition throughout the world in fair confidence that the interests they represent will tend to predominate. Thus they seek only to deny various areas to closed systems, national or imperial. The United States, like Britain in the period of its world dominance, tends towards the "imperialism of free trade," while maintaining the practice of state intervention for the benefit of special interests and demanding special rights (as in the Philippines) where they can be obtained.

Many commentators deny that U.S. policy was determined, or even influenced by long-term imperial objectives, and argue that the Pentagon Papers reveal no imperial drive. A case can be made for this view, particularly in the 1960s. Leslie Gelb makes the interesting point that "no systematic or serious examination of Vietnam's importance to the United States was ever undertaken within the government" (*Foreign Policy*, Summer 1971). He attributes the persistence of the Vietnam venture, in the face of this oversight, to multiple factors: the stranglehold of cold-war assumptions, bureaucratic judgments, anticommunism as a force in American politics and other

domestic pressures and so on. He points out that although the view that "Vietnam had intrinsic strategic military and economic importance" was argued, it never prevailed; properly, of course, since Vietnam has no such *intrinsic* importance. Rather its importance derives from the assumptions of the domino theory, in his formulation, the theory "by which the fall of Indochina would lead to the deterioration of American security around the globe." "It was ritualistic anti-communism and exaggerated power politics that got us into Vietnam," he maintains, noting that these "articles of faith" were never seriously debated (*New York Review of Books*, Dec. 2, 1971).

Hannah Arendt has discussed a variety of rather different irrational factors that impelled policy-makers in Vietnam. "The ultimate aim," she concludes, "was neither power nor profit . . . [nor] . . . particular tangible interests," but rather "image making," "something new in the huge arsenal of human follies." "American policy pursued no real aims, good or bad, that could limit and control sheer fantasy," in particular, no imperial strategy. Ignorance, blind anti-communism, arrogance, self-deception lie behind American policy. She is certainly correct in noting these elements in the Pentagon history. Thus in the face of all historical evidence, the U.S. authorities persisted in the assumption, a point of rigid doctrine, that China was an agent of Moscow, the Viet Cong an agency of North Vietnam, which was in turn the puppet of Moscow or "Peiping" or both, all depending on the mood of the planners and propagandists, who, surely, had more than enough information at hand to refute, or at the very least to shake their confidence in these assumptions. A kind of institutionalized stupidity seems a possible explanation.

There is ample material in the Pentagon Papers to support such interpretations, from the time when Dean Acheson, in a cable to Saigon, spoke of the need to aid the French and the Associated States of Indochina "to defend the territorial integrity of IC and prevent the incorporation of the ASSOC[iated] States within the COMMIE-dominated bloc of slave states" (I, 70; October 1950), and on to the present. One of the most remarkable revelations of the Pentagon Study is that the analysts were able to discover only one staff paper, in a record of more than two decades, "which treats communist reactions primarily in terms of the separate national interests of Hanoi, Moscow, and Peiping, rather than primarily in terms of an overall communist strategy for which Hanoi is acting as an agent" (II, 107; an intelligence estimate of November 1961). Even in the

“intelligence community,” where they are paid to get the facts straight and not to rant about helping the French defend the territorial integrity of Indochina from its people and the Commie-dominated bloc of slave states, it was apparently next to impossible to perceive, or at least express the simple truth that North Vietnam, like the Soviet Union, China, the United States and the NLF, has its own interests, which are often decisive.

It is tempting to use such evidence to support the claim that ignorance, mythology and institutionalized stupidity led U.S. policy-makers into a series of disastrous errors. If only they had realized that Stalin was lukewarm or negative towards Mao and the Greek guerrillas, that there was no “pattern of Communist conquest . . . manifest” in Guatemala in 1954, that the Vietnamese were conducting their own struggle for national liberation. If only William Bundy had had a course in Vietnamese history at Yale. But ignorance and paranoia obscured the facts.

This theory, however, leaves too many questions unanswered. To mention only the simplest: why were policy-makers always subject to the same form of ignorance and irrationality? Why was there such a systematic error in the delusional systems constructed by postwar ideologists? Mere ignorance or foolishness would lead to random error, not to a regular and systematic distortion: unwavering adherence to the principle that whatever the facts may be, revolutionary movements within the U.S. system are sponsored by the USSR, China, or both. Why was this assumption so far beyond challenge that no examination of Vietnam’s importance was ever undertaken? Ignorance and stupidity can surely lead to error, but hardly to such certainty in error. And there is a second and even more obvious question: why is the United States anticommunist?

With respect to the first question, whether it is Acheson, Rostow, Stevenson, Kissinger or whoever, one generally finds the same distortion as in the sorry record of the “intelligence community.” From one or another such source we hear that Stalin supported Mao and incited the Greek guerrillas and Ho Chi Minh; China invaded India; the Viet Cong are agents of international communist aggression; and so on. These are, indeed, articles of faith. The crisis-managers do not argue these claims; they merely intone them. All are at best highly dubious and probably false, so the available record indicates, but questions of fact are beside the point in theological disputation.

What is not beside the point is that these articles of faith are highly functional. The fact is that anticommunism provides a convenient mythology to justify colonial wars. But to explain the U.S. attack on Vietnam on grounds of anticommunist delusions would be as superficial as explaining the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia or Hungary merely on grounds of fear of West Germany or Wall Street. No doubt, at some level, the Soviet leadership believes what it says, and is bewildered at the bitter reaction to its selfless and benevolent behavior. Perhaps, as Peter Wiles suggests (*International Affairs*, April 1971), Russian public opinion "is proud of its country's armed power in Prague and speaks of Czechoslovak weakness, ingratitude, irresponsibility, etc." Similarly, Washington claims to be defending democracy and warding off "internal aggression" or subversion by agents of international communism when it helps to destroy a mass popular movement in Greece, supports an invasion of Guatemala, invades the Dominican Republic and devastates the peasant societies of Indochina, *inter alia*. Its defenders, and many critics as well, are at most willing to concede error if plans go awry, and cannot conceive that any "responsible" or "qualified" observer might have a rather different view. Some still insist that the United States pursues its foreign policy for the most part "for reformist, even utopian goals," and that this policy can only be faulted for being "callow, sentimental, savagely stupid . . . too little the work of an intellectually serious leadership . . ." (William Pfaff, *Condemned to Freedom*). It is remarkable how difficult it is, even for those who see themselves as critics, to interpret U.S. behavior by the standards of evaluation and analysis that would, properly, be applied to any other great power.

The fact that policy-makers may be caught up in the fantasies they spin to disguise imperial intervention, and sometimes may even find themselves trapped by them, should not prevent us from asking what function these ideological constructions fulfill — why *this* particular system of mystification is consistently expounded, in place of some alternative. Similarly, one should not be misled by the fact that the delusional system presents a faint reflection of reality. It must, after all, carry some conviction. But this fact should not prevent us from proceeding to disentangle motive from myth.

Turning to the second question: why is the United States anti-communist? — a conventional answer is that the United States opposes communism because of its aggressive, expansionist character.

Thus Robert Tucker argues that we do not seek to overthrow communism where it represents the status quo, as in Eastern Europe, and that when President Kennedy, in an often-quoted remark, said that we would always prefer a Trujillo to a Castro, he meant that "the power requirements of the struggle with the Soviet Union took precedence over the commitment to a 'decent democratic regime.'"³ As to China, Tucker says:

The containment of China has not been pursued simply because China has a communist government, but because of China's outlook generally and her policy in Asia particularly. It is China's insistence upon changing the Asian status quo, and the methods she has used, that explain American hostility.

Such proposals cannot withstand analysis. It is true, but irrelevant, that the United States will not risk nuclear destruction to roll back communism; again, one cannot overlook the objective limits on American power. Tucker's interpretation of Kennedy's remark seems to presuppose that American hostility towards Castro was a consequence of his turn toward the Soviet Union, which is of course untrue. Perhaps one can debate the question whether American hostility was actually a determining factor in this move, but that it preceded it is beyond argument. With respect to China, Tucker's argument is weaker still. What methods did China use in changing the status quo beyond its borders? In what respect were these methods "objectionable" in comparison with American methods in the Far East? In what sense was the forceful reimposition of French colonialism, in opposition to a communist-led Vietnamese nationalist movement, an attempt to preserve the status quo after World War II? Why the effort to demonstrate that the Vietnamese revolutionaries — or the backers of Arbenz or Bosch — were Russian or Chinese agents, despite the evidence at hand, leading ultimately to the religious faith that this must be so? The answers to these questions entirely undermine Tucker's effort to "explain American hostility."

The question remains: why is the United States anticommunist? Or a further question: why has the United States been antifascist (though selectively)? Why was fascist Japan evil in 1940, while fascist Greece and Portugal (preserving the status quo in Africa) are quite tolerable today? And why is the United States generally

3 Tucker deals with these questions in his *Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Johns Hopkins) and *Nation or Empire* (also Johns Hopkins).

anticolonialist, say in Indonesia shortly after World War II where the conservative nationalist leadership appeared at first to favor foreign investment, but (reluctantly) not in Indochina where the alternative to a barely disguised French colonialism was an indigenous communist resistance?

Friends and enemies can be identified, to a rather good first approximation, in terms of their role in maintaining an integrated global economy in which American capital can operate with relative freedom. The so-called "communist" powers are particularly evil because their "do-it-yourself" model of development tends to extricate them from this system. For this reason, even European colonialism, which was bad enough, is preferable to indigenous communism. For the same reason, Washington will prefer a Trujillo to a Castro.

The Study Group of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Planning Association was perceptive, and more honest than many contemporary ideologists, when it described the primary threat of communism as the economic transformation of the communist powers "in ways which reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West," their refusal to play the game of comparative advantage and to rely primarily on foreign investment for development. If the "developing nations" choose to use their resources for their own purposes, or to carry out internal social change in ways which will reduce their contribution to the industrial economies of the state capitalist world, these powers must be prepared to employ sufficient force to prevent such unreasonable behavior, which will no doubt be described as "internal aggression" by agents of international communism. The Soviet Union reacts no differently when Czechoslovakia seeks a degree of independence or social change.

To be sure, it will often be maintained that U.S. policy is motivated by a concern for political democracy. To test the force of this concern, we can consider how U.S. policy typically evolves when political democracy is destroyed, while U.S. economic intervention is freed from constraints — and we can compare such policy with the typical U.S. reaction when an economy is closed to American economic penetration (whether or not political democracy, in the American sense, is more or less maintained). Latin America provides an ample (though by no means complete) set of test cases. Considering American policy towards Trujillo and Castro, Brazil

and Chile, Guatemala for the past two decades, the Dominican Republic in 1965 and so on, there can be little doubt as to the conclusion of such an investigation. Gordon Connel-Smith, in *The Inter-American System*, a study by no means hostile to U.S. policy, puts the matter in terms that seem quite adequate: “. . . United States concern for representative democracy in Latin America is a facet of her anti-communist policy.” He goes on to say:

There has been no serious question of her intervening in the case of the many right-wing military coups, from which, of course, this policy generally has benefited. It is only when her own concept of democracy, closely identified with private, capitalistic enterprise, is threatened by communism that she has felt impelled to demand collective action to defend it.

It may be argued, with justice, that this view is no more than a first approximation to an understanding of foreign policy, and omits many second-order considerations. Thus it would not be correct to claim that formation of foreign policy is in the interests of a monolithic corporate elite. On the contrary, there are conflicting interests. But we would expect to find, and do find, that those interests that are particularly concerned with foreign policy are well represented in foreign policy formation. By similar dynamics, regulatory agencies tend to fall into the hands of industries that are particularly concerned with their decisions. It is, furthermore, no doubt true that at some point ideology takes on a motive force of its own. There are other interacting, and for the most part mutually supportive factors: the interest of the “state management” in the Pentagon in enhancing its own power; the role of government-induced production of rapidly-obsolcescing luxury goods (largely military) as a technique of economic management, with a resulting need to secure strategic raw materials; the usefulness of an external enemy as a device to whip the taxpayer into line, in support of the production of waste and the costs of empire; the heady sense of power, to which academic ideologues in particular seem to succumb so readily. Such factors as these produce a fairly stable system to support the basic imperial drive, which is second nature to the men of power in the state executive in any event. There are many specific factors that must be considered in a detailed examination of particular decisions, such as those that led us ever more deeply into Indochina. Nevertheless, it seems reasonably clear that American policy, like that of any great power, is guided by the “national interest” as conceived by dominant social

groups, in this case, the goal of maximizing the free access by American capital to the markets and human and material resources of the world, the goal of maintaining to the fullest possible extent its freedom of operation in a global economy. At the same time, ideologists labor to mask these endeavors in a functional system of beliefs.

It is interesting that such analyses of foreign policy, which incorporate the material interests of private or quasi-private capital as a central factor interacting with others, are often characterized as "vulgar economic determinism" or the like when put forth by opponents of the system of private control of resources and the means of production. On the other hand, rather similar formulations receive little attention when they appear in official explanations of state policy or in right-wing literature. What is more, explanations that emphasize, say, vague emotional states (a feeling of insecurity or "irrelevance as a model") or ideological elements or error are not similarly characterized as "vulgar emotional (ideological) determinism" or "vulgar fallibilism." The term "vulgar economic determinism" is particularly surprising, given that those segments of (quasi-) private capital that are particularly affected by foreign policy decisions are generally well represented in the formation of state policy. One would therefore expect that the view mislabeled "vulgar economic determinism" would serve as a kind of null hypothesis. Since it is, furthermore, quite plausible as an explanation for basic foreign policy decisions (and, not infrequently, the justifications offered for them), the reaction becomes still more curious. The label too often serves to deflect attention from the proposed explanations, which are much easier to ignore when misrepresented. This is a standard reaction to analysis that raises questions about prevailing ideology. Compare much of the response to "revisionist" work on the cold war several years ago. Many illustrations can be given. The matter is worth investigation in itself.

To my mind, one of the more depressing paragraphs of the Pentagon study is in the epilogue, where the analyst comments on the change of tactics after the Tet offensive in early 1968 (IV, 603). He reports that "large and growing elements of the American public had begun to believe the cost [of the war] had already reached unacceptable levels and would strongly protest a large increase in that cost." If the analyst is correct, then the public is at one with the executive in its almost exclusive concern with the costs to us of

continued aggression. I doubt the accuracy of this assessment, but it seems that the Nixon administration is counting on it, and is hoping that a less costly technological war, with automated fire control systems and mercenaries in place of GIs, with helicopter gunships and smart bombs in place of Westmoreland's "meatgrinder," may still succeed in destroying the infrastructure of the enemy and guaranteeing to the people of Indochina the particular variety of independence that U.S. global strategy will tolerate. If he is correct, then the McNamara study might just as well gather dust in the vaults of the Pentagon.

Hans Morgenthau

Let me say, first of all, that the Pentagon Papers are not a very interesting collection of documents. They show in great detail and in a kind of empirical vividness what some of us had already known before, that is, the intellectual emptiness of the policy-makers. What you have here is an endless repetition, an endless bureaucratic repetition of certain clichés, certain stereotypes, which pretend to reflect political reality. In truth, what we are faced with is a system of superstitions, of figments of the imagination. William Graham Sumner said seventy years ago that the amount of superstition in the world has not changed, only it attaches now to politics rather than to religion. No truer words have been spoken about contemporary politics, domestic and international, and I myself, who have been involved in debating, privately and publicly, with most of the authors of the Pentagon Papers, can testify to the complete uselessness of my endeavors to bring "the truth" to the attention of the policy-makers, from the president downward. It was as useless an enterprise as it would be for a biologist to tell a believing Catholic that the idea of the Immaculate Conception violates the basic principles³ of biology. It was simply an inadequate, an inappropriate, way of approaching an issue which is really not the issue of truth versus error, but rather evolves from a system of superstitions which the policy-makers must hold on to in order to survive intellectually and morally. The policy-makers started out to embark upon a policy rather thoughtlessly and without any understanding and any attempt to understand, the consequences of their actions — really, sliding into the morass of Indochina. And once you are in, you man-

ufacture a theory which justifies your being in and pretends to reflect the realities of the situation. One of the main props of this system of superstition is the domino theory, and I must say I am much less enthusiastic about it than my distinguished colleague. First of all, the domino theory was first developed by the Marxists, who proclaimed that the triumph of communism in one country would inevitably be followed by the triumph of communism in other countries, until the whole world had gone communist. It was, in other words, a determinism which you see clearly in the early discussions of the Politburo and the arguments of Lenin in 1918, for instance. You see it again in the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky: once communism had triumphed in the Soviet Union, it would inevitably triumph, first in the highly industrialized nations and then throughout the whole world. This belief in the predetermined triumph of communism is obviously an ideological myth. History has shown that there exists no such inevitability, but that communism has spread for very mundane reasons, for very specific historic reasons, but not because of an innate inevitability, inherent in the very phenomenon of communism. We have taken over the determinism of the communists and have frightened ourselves with the spectre of communism irresistibly spreading over the world once it has triumphed in a particular nation. It is of course in the nature of historic events to have consequences, and the triumph of communism in South Vietnam, if it ever happens, is going to have consequences elsewhere, in the Soviet Union, in the United States, in China, around the world. It will be, you may say, a shot heard 'round the world. But to say that because the Thieu government is going to be replaced by a communist national government in South Vietnam, Thailand or any other nation will inevitably go communist is simply to fall victim to a superstition.

Secondly, the idea that the Vietnamese adventure is an organic expression of the imperial policies of the ruling group of the United States seems to me to be insufficiently supported by the historic evidence. We are of course all aware of the reductionism which connects causally and functionally systems of ideas with economic considerations and interests. This reductionism assumes that a particular concept, a particular system of ideas, a particular political purpose, cannot stand on its own feet, cannot be justified, cannot be understood even, by dint of its own intrinsic merits, but that it is a mere epiphenomenon of underlying economic tendencies.

This is again an application of Marxist conceptions to the Vietnam situation and to American foreign policy. I have nothing against the fact that it is a Marxist conception, but I have something against

its being untrue. For it seems to me that the Pentagon Papers are a good example of the self-sufficiency of intellectual errors to determine policy, foreign and domestic. In other words, we all, in our private capacity think and act frequently in noneconomic terms, and frequently we are led to disaster by the autonomous force of our emotions. There is no reason to believe that if policy-maker X acts in this manner in his private capacity, he will not act in the same manner in his public capacity. It seems to me indeed that if you look at the whole web of erroneous ideas and misconceptions, the whole veil of superstitions which in the guise of an interpretation of reality has been spread over reality in order to conceal it, that this by itself is sufficient to explain the misadventure in which we are engaged.

The question has been raised, what is the function of those ideas and those misconceptions? Are those misconceptions an intrinsic element in the economic drive; are they part of the ideological superstructure seeking to justify and rationalize and make acceptable to the public at large those economic drives? It is obvious that ideas can be used and are typically used for the purposes of ideological justification and rationalization. The Bible is the main example. But it doesn't follow that the significance of a system of thought exhausts itself in being misused for such ideological purposes. Again, look at the Pentagon Papers and, more particularly, at the overall justification in recent times of our policy in Vietnam, and consider the spontaneous reactions of two successive presidents. When Ambassador Lodge returned from Vietnam in November 1967 to brief President Kennedy on the hopeless situation in Vietnam, President Kennedy was dead. He briefed President Johnson, and it was one of his first acts as president to listen to Mr. Lodge. Mr. Johnson's spontaneous reaction was that he would not be the first president to lose a war. And Mr. Nixon repeated this statement verbatim when he became president. It makes no difference that the statement is historically incorrect, for Madison certainly didn't win the War of 1812. What is important is that we are here confronted not with the objective laws of historic development in the form of economic determinism, but with the frailty of human beings, in which we all have, to a greater or lesser extent, a part. In other words, here are statesmen, so-called, who are simply too weak to recognize publicly, although they might recognize privately, that they and their predecessors have made a terrible mistake, and in consequence they aren't able to liquidate that mistake. A statesman who had a superabundance of self-confidence, de Gaulle, was capable of liquidating the Algerian war, for he was convinced that his position in history could not be negatively affected by that

liquidation. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Nixon for very good objective reasons have no such assurance. And so they are constrained to continue this enterprise, for better or for worse, you might very well say, till death do us part. And they must create a world of fiction, a system of superstitions, which attempts objectively to justify and to rationalize what they are doing. I am intellectually satisfied with this interpretation of the status quo throughout the world. Since 1917, they have to resort to what I really regard as another mythology, that is, the self-interest of the economic forces which govern us. I have no doubt that those economic forces have a very vital interest in the perpetuation of the status quo throughout the world. Since 1917, they have been mortally afraid of the threat successful communism would present to the status quo in the world and, more particularly, at home. They don't care so much about the world, but they care very much about what happens in their own country. But to admit this is one thing, and to assume a linear relationship between this basic self-interest, in which not only businessmen, but lots of other people share as well, and American foreign policy seems to me really to substitute another superstition for the superstition of the Pentagon Papers.

Questions & Answers

DANIEL ROSE: I'd like to ask Professor Chomsky what he felt the motivation was in commissioning the Pentagon Papers?

CHOMSKY: What McNamara's motivation was, you mean? Well, I don't know anything about McNamara. I assume it was mainly curiosity to find out what went wrong so that they could do it better next time. There is no input from McNamara recorded, so one can only speculate, but the main characteristic of the very technical discussion given there is a critique of what went wrong. And in fact there are some revealing comments here and there. For example Leslie Gelb, the editor of the papers, who was responsible for the summary and analysis sections, in the summary and analysis of the chapter on the advisory buildup, 1961 to 1967, says what I think are some quite revealing things: In particular, he says that we have to concede that the Vietnamese national movement was captured by the communists, and he says further that this posed the United States with difficult problems. These problems were complicated still further by what he refers to as the difficult issue of Vietcong allegiance to and control by Communist China, and I must say that at this point I entirely agree with Mr. Morgenthau that a person is capable of staying

really caught up in a network of incredible superstitious beliefs. But this is the historian talking, not the policy-planner. And then he goes on to say that we have the general problem of trying to evaluate the effectiveness of counterinsurgency theory and practice, which is a very difficult problem, and is rendered still more complicated by the lack of laboratory control, but a problem that must be studied in order to guide future policy. I think he expresses a certain insight there. On the one hand, that kind of terminology and rhetoric gives a good indication of the kind of mentality which is really able to carry out the kind of policies that have been conducted in Indochina by looking at them as purely technical problems. But he does express a certain insight by saying that we have to investigate this matter in detail in order to guide future policy. Because I think the United States faces similar situations in other parts of the world. It's faced with the problem of destroying indigenous revolutionary and nationalist movements, some of which in the natural course of events may adopt the so-called communist model of development, and will therefore — in accordance with American ideology — be characterized as agencies of international communism and destroyed. And the hope is that we will be able to do it better next time. I presume that was, if not the motivation of McNamara, about which I can only guess, at least the motivation of most of the authors of the Pentagon Papers.

MARSHALL COHEN: I find it somewhat difficult to decide between the general theories proposed by Mr. Chomsky and Mr. Morgenthau. Would each one state the main failure of the opposing theory?

CHOMSKY: Well, if I can start, I think that Professor Morgenthau's characterization is rather accurate for the mid-1960s, and I would accept it for that period. I think it was a period of excessive irrationality and virtual hysteria in decision-making. And my own feeling is that that fact — there one can only speculate; I can't give documentary evidence — is probably related to the flow of academic intellectuals to Washington. That is probably related to this tendency toward hysteria and irrationality, for various reasons. On the other hand, it seems to me that Professor Morgenthau's theory fails to account for quite a substantial mass of documentation in the period from 1945–1960 which simply draws in great detail a certain picture of the interrelationship of American foreign economic and strategic interests and events expected in Indochina. The main weakness in Mr. Morgenthau's theory is this: he is arguing, if I understand him correctly, that there is just a series of mistakes and confusions and errors. But notice that there were some very systematic errors. Always the same thing was believed — in Greece, in Italy, in Indochina, in Guatemala,

in the Dominican Republic — always the same error. I think there is a very simple explanation for that so-called error, namely that such developments are inimical to the freedom of American capital to operate in these areas. By claiming foreign control, U.S. intervention is justified on “defensive” grounds.

The second question that has to be raised, and I don’t believe it was answered adequately by Mr. Morgenthau’s theory, is why the United States is anticommunist. Why is it we are selectively anti-colonialist, that is, opposed to European colonialism if the alternative is a free system of open societies, but in favor of European colonialism if the alternative is communism? It seems to me there is a very simple answer to these systematic errors and this systematic policy direction: namely, that the United States is primarily guided by the policy of maintaining open societies, that is, societies that are open to American economic penetration.

MORGENTHAU: Well, I fully agree that the errors of perception and judgment of reality are not random, but systematic. But the systematic character flows from a picture of the world consistent with itself and inconsistent with reality. An example: thinking illness is caused by witches. A society could take consistent action for centuries, and you don’t need an economic interpretation to explain the consistency of the error. In other words, as long as your erroneous picture of the world is consistent within itself, and as long as you are willing to act on such a conception of the world, your actions will be internally consistent, even though they are utterly unrealistic. It is of course true that in the period immediately following the Second World War, we were primarily concerned with economic problems, for the very simple reason that the solution of the economic problems was then a matter of life or death. That is to say, if you couldn’t salvage the economies of Italy, West Germany and France, communism was likely to take over there. Thus, the Marshall Plan, followed by foreign aid in the late forties and throughout the fifties, was one of the main instruments of American foreign policy, as foreign aid became, under Krushchev, one of the main instruments of Soviet foreign policy in the Third World. The third issue which has been raised, why it is that we are anticommunist — I think the answer is again quite simple. If we are antifascist for moral and philosophic and historic reasons, then we are anticommunist for similar reasons. But when it came to a choice between fascism and communism, we chose fascism; for fascism at least respects one of the main props in our secular theology, that is, the right of property.

CHOMSKY: That is exactly my point. In other words, Brazil can be

as fascist, terroristic and vicious as it likes. But it will still receive huge American aid, as it did from 1964, because it provides a favorable investment climate for the United States. It's exactly as every aid official who testifies before Congress says repeatedly. Now, on the other hand, Chile, let's say, can more or less respect American-type political forms, but it's going to receive only American hostility, because it doesn't provide a favorable investment climate to the United States.

LEON FESTINGER: Mr. Morgenthau says some unspecified ideology is the villain and Mr. Chomsky says economics is the villain. And Mr. Morgenthau says that economics is perhaps one manifestation of this ideological villain. I would like to hear indications from either or both of you as to how I could choose between your interpretations.

CHOMSKY: There is a difference. I think that I am suggesting a fairly clear criterion, which I think is a good first approximation, that has some predictive value. As I say, it is not the full explanation, but I claim that it's a good first approximation, if you like. And that is, I repeat, that the United States will, with reasonably high probability, tend to support those forces in some foreign country that offer the best hope of maintaining the freedom for American capital to operate in that country and to make use of material and human resources in that country. I think that is, in general, the operative criterion. I would claim, in fact, that the series of examples that I mentioned support that. And I don't know of any counterexamples. Furthermore, I would claim beyond that that this is what is asserted by and large in internal documents, not meant for propaganda, but simply meant for internal debate and discussion. The internal documents of the NSC reports, say, of the Pentagon Papers serve as a good illustration. I don't want to claim too much. I think that in the area of national policy and politics you can't formulate scientific theories on the order of physics or anything like that, but thinking of what one can do in the social sciences, it seems to me that this is a pretty successful theory. It has its defects, and I would like to insist on a number of them. For example, I don't think it accounts for what the United States did in 1965 in Indochina, as I mentioned. I think that there was a strong component of hysteria that operated at that point, and I think you see it reflected in the internal documents. But it does seem to me that at the earlier stage, it did explain what was happening, and I believe myself that today again that probably explains what is happening. That is another issue, but I think that Nixon and Kissinger are moving back to a sort of rational, probably vicious, imperial policy which probably has some hopes of achieving the goals that they have set. I should mention, incidentally, that

it seems to me that the hypothesis that I've suggested should be a sort of null hypothesis, for a very simple reason. Foreign policy is made by the executive. The executive is overwhelmingly staffed by representatives of corporate interests, in fact, generally those corporate interests primarily concerned with foreign policy. There are splits and divergences among those who own the American private economy, but the tendency seems to me to be that the same kind of dynamics that leads to the taking over of a regulatory agency by those elements of private capitalism that are regulated leads to the taking over of foreign policy by those elements of the corporate establishment that are primarily concerned with it. The oil companies are an obvious case. They are seriously affected by foreign policy and decisions. It would seem to me that it is a kind of null hypothesis that one would expect those groups who in fact staff the executive to undertake actions that are favorable to the interests that they represent, while at the same time they would define these as the national interest. And it seems to me if you look at internal documents, such as the National Security Council Memoranda, you discover that. And furthermore, more interestingly, if you look at events, you find that the operative criterion that I suggested really is working in virtually every case. That's my proposal.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I would like to ask both of you a question. What kind of criterion is there for arriving at an intelligent foreign policy, one presumably in the national interest? I think that the differences between you are rather crucial here. Because, to simplify a little, if stupidity, as Mr. Morgenthau has suggested, is the main cause of our policy, I think it would obviously follow that the policy could not have been in the national interest. That is, it's hard to figure out how stupidity is good for the national interest, assuming there is such a thing as the national interest. On the other hand, if, as Mr. Chomsky claims, our policy was from certain points of view rational and represents certain economic interests, the question arises whether these economic interests are in opposition to something called the national interest. And if they are, how does one define the national interest, and therefore an intelligent and desirable foreign policy?

MORGENTHAU: I think if one takes the position that the national interest is a mere reflection of the parochial interests of certain ruling groups, primarily defined in economic terms, one precludes oneself from visualizing an objective national interest. One also precludes oneself from any objective criticism of a foreign policy which is supposed to be the reflection of that particular parochial interest. And we are faced again with the platonic issue of the distinction between opinion and truth. If there is no objective interest which can be ra-

tionally demonstrated, then you have nothing to go on but rival and contradictory, if not incompatible, parochial interests, each claiming to be *the* national interest. I happen to believe that there is a possibility by rational political analysis to arrive at certain objective conclusions which define in broad terms what the national interest is and particularly to define in negative terms what it is not. If, let me say, the purpose of American foreign policy is the security of the United States, of its territory and its institutions, then certainly the policies we have been pursuing in Vietnam are utterly destructive of the national interest. And I don't need to prove that they are the result of the parochial interest of a particular ruling group. Even if I were to demonstrate this, I wouldn't have demonstrated anything about the validity, or lack of it, of this particular type of national interest. I could say that what is good for General Motors in our Vietnam policies I don't regard to be good from my point of view. I would take the position of DuPont, let me say, which pursues a different national interest in Vietnam. So, you see, if you assume the national interest is a mere fiction, a mere ideological justification and rationalization of particular parochial interests, you have nothing to go on except the rivalry of different and frequently incompatible powerful interests, each claiming to be the national one. I indeed believe that if you did not assume that there exists an objective national interest, you wouldn't be capable of criticizing or approving of a particular foreign policy, either historical or contemporary. We can pass judgment on, let's say, the foreign policy of Laval, not in terms of the special interest of a particular economic group in France, but in terms of the objective interests of France, particularly in view of history. We can say that his foreign policy was right or wrong in objective terms because it did or did not achieve the aim that it undertook for itself. Or we could apply the same criteria to the foreign policy of Metternich or Bismarck or Hamilton or anybody you can think of. So in other words, if we did not have in our own minds the conception of an objective national interest, we could only have subjective opinions about foreign policy. We couldn't pretend to judge foreign policy in objective terms.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: To get an idea of what this would mean concretely, can you give any instances of American foreign policy in the last ten years that could have represented the national interest? Or would you say that for the last ten or twelve years America has been acting contrary to its national interest?

MORGENTHAU: It certainly has been acting contrary to its national interests in Southeast Asia. Since we have not been governed by out-

right madmen or idiots, our foreign policy hasn't been consistently in violation of the national interest. It is not a question of black and white, of utter madness or complete rationality. But in certain very vital respects, our foreign policy has been destructive of the national interest. Look at the moral position of the United States today and compare it with what it was even ten years ago. It has not been a judgment from heaven which has brought this decline about, but our own self-destructive foreign policy.

CHOMSKY: Well, I have a somewhat different attitude toward that whole problem, also to the last empirical judgment. I think that what is called the national interest in American ideology, and here we are like any other power, is, in fact, the specific parochial interest of a particular ruling group. I do not think that that is the "national interest." And curiously, I think that Professor Morgenthau and I have probably tended to agree on every specific judgment as to what is the right or wrong thing to do in recent years, though we have a rather different approach to it. But, I'm very skeptical as to whether there is in general something that could be called the national interest. There are undoubtedly historical moments when it is sufficiently obvious what is in the interest of virtually every member of a given society. Say, defending it from outside aggression and so on. And even there, there are plenty of collaborators who feel that it is in their interest to collaborate and have the outside power win. But still I think that in many instances there are conflicting groups within a society and they will very much differ as to what they regard as being in their interest, and depending on which of them happens to be dominant, they will be in a position to define so-called national interests. And the only question is how well can those ruling groups whose parochial interests define the national interest, how well can they succeed in maintaining the global hegemony in their interests? They can't do it entirely, and as the case of the Vietnamese revolution shows, they may have a lot of difficulty in doing it. But if we consider the options, the alternatives that were really open to them, it seems to me that the choices made by these ruling groups, though by no means optimal for the people of the United States necessarily, may have been and I think largely were in the interests of the ruling groups—the best, nearly the best they could have taken, with minor exceptions like those I've mentioned.

RAYMOND S. RUBINOW: I would like to ask two questions of the speakers, one based on their disagreement, and one based on what I hope may be their common agreement. First, how does it happen that for twenty years both sides brought their intellectuals to Washington and both

perceived reality incorrectly? Second, what the Pentagon Papers seem to show us is the capacity of each successive administration to accept the premises of the previous administration without any fundamental reexamination. Is there a lesson to be drawn from the Pentagon Papers and from the Cuban experience earlier which we can apply to other problems to make decisions in advance of the event?

MORGENTHAU: Let me first try to answer your first question: why it is that a succession of intelligent and knowledgeable people who have come to Washington have partaken in the same kind of error. That is simply answered, for there exists a kind of selectivity through which only those people will be admitted to Washington who approve of and strengthen the misconceptions of the ruling group. In other words, what the ruling group cannot afford is to have the veil of error lifted which conceals reality from them. We are here in the presence of a truly psychotic situation. You create a world which is a figment of the imagination, and you act on it as if it were the real world. What you cannot afford is to accept an opinion which proves to you that this world which you regard to be the real one is a mere figment of your imagination. You cannot allow this fictitious world to be revealed for the fiction it is; for you cannot afford to face reality as it actually is. You know the joke about the difference between a neurotic and a psychotic: the psychotic believes that two and two make five; the neurotic believes that two and two make four, but he is unhappy about it. We have been governed by psychotics, by people who really believed and still believe that two and two make five. And they cannot afford to face the reality that two and two make four.

CHOMSKY: I would again disagree, for reasons I've mentioned already. But take the specific case you mention of Cuba and apply the criterion I suggested and I think it predicts exactly what successive administrations did in fact try to do. They were necessarily opposed to the Cuban revolution, given the underlying motivation of preserving as much of the world in general, and particularly Cuba, for the free movement of American capital and the exploitation of its human and material resources. And that is precisely why there was never any question that any American administration would do anything but oppose the Cuban revolution, not because they didn't like the way it was going to turn out for the people of Cuba or be Russian-dominated or something like that, but because it was a so-called communist revolution which would in fact close, extricate the society from the American-dominated global economy. So the criterion worked perfectly in that case. The only mistake of the American policy-makers is that they didn't succeed in wiping it out. That was an error. Maybe they could have done it better some other way. But

here is what would seem to me to be a perfect example not, I believe, of psychosis or irrationality, but of the rather clear and systematic operation of the very same underlying drive which I mentioned, which I think is a very reasonable drive for those people who in fact have in their private lives the primary goal of expanding and extending the power of that group, that component of the economy that they represent. No surprise whatsoever that when they move into the executive branch of the government, they do precisely and exactly the same thing. And they say that they do. So that's just another example to show, I think, that this null hypothesis is correct.

FREDERIC TUTEN: I'm curious to know why you think we haven't operated in the same way as we operated in Guatemala years ago in places like Chile and Peru. Are we just biding our time or do we have Brazil as a buffer?

CHOMSKY: Well, I think there are objective limits on American power. It's one thing to launch a kind of covert invasion of Guatemala, and it would be something very different to invade Peru or Chile. Don't forget that at almost the same time that Eisenhower initiated the covert invasion of Guatemala, he did not do the same in Bolivia. There he picked a different way: namely, he supported some moderately leftist forces, which in fact were the most right-wing forces that existed there with any popular base. And ultimately through that mechanism in about a dozen years he had succeeded in reopening the country to American capital as intended. Now, in South America I think that the main U.S. policy is to try to groom Brazil as the gendarme of South America. During the last Bolivian coup, it was different from 1952. In fact, Brazilian newspapers had pictures of Brazilian tanks in La Paz—they hadn't even taken the insignia off, they were so blatant about it. They could not do that in 1952. Now Brazil is going to be, I think is intended to be, the subimperial gendarme for Latin America which will ultimately threaten Peru and Bolivia and countries to its north and so on. But I just don't see what else the United States could do in Chile and Peru that would succeed in meeting the demands of its ruling group. The ITT thing is an example of what some people would like it to do, but I don't see how they could carry it off at this stage.

JOEL KOVEL: I agree with Mr. Chomsky that the primary line of explanation has to be economic in these matters, but I disagree with his contention that the primary motivation can be accounted for by rational factors. It seems to me that your two arguments could be brought much closer together if we grant that what seems rational is really a rationalization which includes in the totality of its action a rational function. The economic processes in America are destruc-

tive. There's a sense of guilt on the part of policy-makers. They will act to protect themselves against being found out. At the same time they behave so stupidly as to eventually bring down ruin upon themselves.

CHOMSKY: Well, there may be something to what you say; I don't want to sound dogmatic about it, but I think there is a simpler explanation. For one thing, it is by no means obvious that the Kennedy and later Johnson intellectuals made the wrong decision from the point of view of the rational calculations of the American ruling groups. They provided the shield behind which this great miracle of capitalist economic progress in East Asia could take place. So it's by no means obvious that they made the wrong decision. On the other hand, I do also think that there was a new element introduced in the 1960s. I think that it's not surprising, let's say, that a Walt Rostow would be somewhat different from, let's say, an Averell Harriman in the kind of policies that he would tend to carry out. I pick Walt Rostow as an example — I don't mean to criticize him specifically — of the sort of academic intellectuals who went down to Washington under Kennedy. What is the basis for their power? Well, the basis for their power is that they are right, that they are smart, that they know something others do not know, that they don't make mistakes, that they are the "first team," as McGeorge Bundy put it. On the other hand, as far as Harriman is concerned, the basis for his power is that his grandfather or his father or whoever it was built railroads. I mean, no matter what mistakes he makes, he still has a right to power. So he can be quite pragmatic and he can change his policies and he can tell you that that was wrong, do something else, and so on and so forth. Walt Rostow can't say that. If he says, oh yes fellows, I was all wrong, do it the other way around, then what he is saying is there is no reason at all why I should be here. Now, this is oversimplifying or exaggerating. But I think there is a difference there. And I believe that the difference might account for the tendency toward irrational exaggeration and the hysteria one senses in mid-sixties policy-making.

GERALD FREUND: Where, in fact, can we first see economic determinism as the main thrust of American policy? Was it with the Truman Doctrine? In mentioning the earlier examples, you left out Korea. Is that another example? If economic determinism is in fact a fundamental thrust of this country's foreign policy and its role in international relations, is it the only determining force?

CHOMSKY: Well, first of all, I never used the term economic determinism. I said that the individuals that do largely staff the executive have in fact been drawn from specific segments of the corporate elite

— not by chance, but rather by the dynamics that I mentioned — those segments of the corporate elite that are affected by foreign policy decisions. And they acted in their perceived self-interests. Furthermore, rather similar observations hold, as I mentioned in my talk, for virtually every other nation that I know of, certainly the Soviet Union. And I think that by and large it's true, in a general way — I don't want to exaggerate — of very large segments of world history. But I am not trying to present a universal theory, that's too much. Rather, let's look at the examples that you talked about. Korea, for one. I did mention Korea. I said that one of the defects of the Pentagon Papers is that they don't compare what the United States was doing in Vietnam to what it was doing at the same time in Korea and what it was doing at the same time in Greece and many other places. And in Korea, in particular in the very interesting 1945–1950 period, what the United States was doing was, I believe, very similar to what it was doing at exactly that time in Greece and what it has been trying to do, not successfully, in Vietnam in the past twenty-five years: namely, to destroy indigenous social and political structures which were fully operative when the American forces landed in September 1945, and which, in fact, had to be slowly dismantled by force and by terror and by murder over a five-year period in order to establish the extreme right-wing forces imposed by the United States and opposed, by the way, in South Korea by every other nationalist force that existed. You can read all about this in the military histories. There is no secret about it, and there is also no dispute about it. The only dispute is as to why. Well, if you look in academic history, say the study by Gregory Henderson of Harvard, you find that he describes all this in fair detail, but he says, well, you know, the Americans in command were stupid. They didn't have good translators. They didn't know who it was they were getting rid of. If they had only had better advice, then they would have done it differently. They wouldn't have dismantled the republic that existed and destroyed the unions and imposed an extreme right-wing regime and so on and so forth, they would have done something else. Well, fine. I don't believe it for one reason, because it happens to be exactly what they did in Greece. It was the same "stupidity," if you like, and it had the same effect. And it's exactly what they have been trying to do in Vietnam. Now go back to World War II. Well, yes, it is striking to see here — I think Gabriel Kolko has made a very fundamental contribution in pointing it out, and I think he's basically right — how the United States in the Second World War acted quite consciously, I believe he demonstrates, to dismantle the British Em-

pire. But don't forget the very criterion that I mentioned, namely freeing the world for American economic penetration, makes the United States anticolonialist. It makes us opposed in general to other imperial systems which are semiclosed, unless those are, of course, the only alternatives to worse things, say indigenous nationalist systems like the communist ones. So, in fact, during the Second World War the United States acted very consistently and with considerable success to take over British economic positions in Latin America and the Middle East, to keep England on a string, sort of, with just enough lend-lease aid to keep it going, but not enough to maintain its preferential positions elsewhere in the world. And that was very successful. The American oil companies and American interests in Latin America, they just took over there. And, incidentally, it seems to me to be the very same criterion I'm suggesting that by and large governed the policy of the British Empire. Britain was protectionist, strongly protectionist, until I think about 1830, until in fact it had succeeded through protectionism in destroying Indian cottage industry and building up domestic textiles and other industry and becoming the industrial leader of the world by the rape of India and other practices. Then for a very long period, about a century, England was all in favor of free trade. Let's be perfectly equal. British industry is equal to the industry in the most remote primitive country. We are all on a par. Then in about 1930, say, when Japanese industry and Japanese textiles were beginning to press a little too close for comfort, all of a sudden Britain discovered that it wasn't really too interested in free trade, and in 1932 at the Ottawa conference they tried to close the empire to Japanese penetration. Why? Well, because they couldn't win any more. The most advanced industrial power in the world will naturally always be in favor of free trade, because it hopes and expects that it will win in the competition. And when it finds that it no longer can win in an open competition, it will move to other policies. The United States by and large tends to the same direction. On the other hand, in areas where the United States won't be able to win it will introduce protectionist policies like any other power. So I don't think that there is really anything fundamentally different in the American policies that I'm talking about and those of the British Empire. And with some modifications, the same applies to other major imperial powers, like the Soviet Union.

H. WILLIAM FITELSON: May I make a personal comment and ask for an answer from both, primarily from Professor Morgenthau? I think that Professor Chomsky's position is the rather conventional one. He makes history rather consistent. We've made the same, not errors, but deliberate moves, all the time. The more interesting posi-

tion is Professor Morgenthau's. But what is the solution? Is the solution, as Professor Chomsky indicates, a reversal of the ruling class? What does each suggest as a possible solution?

MORGENTHAU: I think the logic of your question is addressed to Professor Chomsky, but I will do both of you the favor and try to answer the question. First of all, the answer to your question is that you need not so much intelligent policy-makers, which we have got, as morally independent policy-makers. The problem with our government, not only in foreign policy but in domestic policy as well, is not technical incompetence but moral corruption. I have talked, as I have said before, privately and publicly to most of the people who have made American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I have tried to bring, and I have been successful in trying to bring, my opinions on Vietnam to the attention of the president in 1965. What was his reaction? Not to test my opinions, which were put forward in rather moderate and decent terms, but to try to destroy me. He established in the White House a "Project Morgenthau," staffed with a full-time man, for the purpose of getting something on me. He mobilized the FBI and Internal Revenue Service, and he ordered the Secretary of Defense in unprintable language to fire me forthwith. I'm not reporting this in an egotistical way, but as a symptom of the disease which doesn't operate in the realm of intelligence or of competence or knowledge, but of morality. Or take an eminent colleague of mine, who will make a speech in '67 or '68 defending the policy in Vietnam and then, after the speech, take you aside and tell you that the policy is a complete disaster, but he couldn't say so in public without losing his contacts with the government. The ITT case is only a particularly spectacular example of a moral disease, which, if it is not cured, will ruin this nation. This is one answer to your question.

Of course, if one accepts the economic interpretation of American foreign policy, one is forced to the conclusion, as you have indicated, that instead of this ruling group we ought to have a different ruling group. But which ruling group will it be? If American history teaches anything, from populism to the Great Society, it is that social reform has not been able to touch the roots of social, economic and political power in the United States. We are really in the presence of an enormously stable society, whose rough edges might have been polished or might have been even altered, but if you look at the seat of power, the roots of power, in the United States seventy or eighty years ago, you find that they were then where they are today. That state of affairs cannot be changed by revolution, for in a modern state a popular revolution is an absurdity; it has become technologically im-

possible. The modern state can be overturned only by a coup d'état, sometimes misnamed "revolution."

CHOMSKY: Well, this may surprise you, but I tend to agree with a lot of those remarks, except some of those predictions, which I am not so sure about. I do think that the problem in foreign policy is essentially a moral one. I'm certainly not in favor of replacing the present ruling group with some other ruling group, which in my opinion will act in approximately the same way. I don't see fundamentally much difference in systems, with respect to foreign policy, between state capitalism of the American type and state socialism of the Soviet type. I began by talking about the very striking and remarkable fact that in the Pentagon Papers there is no case, not a single case, of any decision made on anything other than the cost to the decision-maker and the interests that he represents. The absolute heights or depths of immorality, whichever way they go. And that might very well be the case under the rule of the society by some different ruling group. On the other hand, I think that the only place where I would tend to be more optimistic is that I don't believe that it is necessary to have a powerful state ruled by some group. I think that in principle in an advanced technological society it is possible, feasible and, in fact, necessary — one might argue for survival, maybe even physical survival, but at least moral survival — to destroy centralized power, whether it be authoritarian power of private capitalism or state socialism or whatever. And I think one may hope — you can't prove it, but one may hope — that under a system which is less immoral in its structure of power and decision-making and more democratic, it is conceivable that human beings will be able to act more morally, that their decent moral instincts, which I think exist, will not be corrupted by the system of coercion and authority, of which private capitalism or state capitalism is one instance and Soviet state socialism is another.

ROBERT JAY LIFTON: We have been preoccupied with the basic cause, or fundamental cause, and there has been a sort of polite difference of opinion. But in the process we've left out what might be called the in-between *modus vivendi* of the whole process. One thing that strikes me about the Pentagon Papers, and I'm sure it must have struck both of you, is what I would call the tremendously technicist bias. There really is a notion, without the actors being aware of it, of the world being made of a large machine: one puts certain parts in place with American know-how and solves the "problem" over there in Vietnam without being able for various reasons to ask in any large or certainly moral way whether the problem should be solved by Americans, or what the goals of solving the problem are. How do each of you see

this question of technicism? Is it an inevitable sort of outcome of what you put forth or something more?

MORGENTHAU: I think we have mentioned this before. You are entirely correct in your reference to an entirely mechanistic approach to policy-making. The fundamental questions are never raised. The question, for instance, of why a million men are not willing to fight and die for Thieu while two hundred thousand men would rather fight and die for the independence of their country than live under Thieu, which is really the basic issue, is never raised. But the point I made before is that such questions cannot be raised in the kind of fictitious world which the policy-makers have erected and in which they live and operate. They cannot destroy it without risking their own collapse.

CHOMSKY: I'd like to put a slightly different slant on it, although I don't basically disagree. I also think that the major questions are rarely raised, although I don't say never, because I think in the documentation from 1945 to 1960 they are raised, and a very definite and clear assertion is made about them. But the general question of whether it is right for the United States to control another society, of course that is not raised. It's just taken for granted. But I think the real contribution of technology to this is . . . well, is somewhat different. If you can succeed in formulating the problems in technical terms; if your problem can be reformulated, as it is, let's say, by Leslie Gelb in the section that I quoted, as a problem of the adequacy of counterinsurgency theory in practice in the absence of effective laboratory controls, or some other gibberish of that sort; if that's the kind of formulation you can pose for yourself and others, then for one thing you don't have to worry about, say, the absolutely imbecilic hypothesis that the Vietcong are agents of China, the hypothesis that he says makes the problem so difficult. You can just sort of take that for granted. That comes from somebody else's department. You are the technician who comes from outside to solve the problem. You accept the hypothesis; you don't have to worry about the fact that you are fighting the Vietnamese from this point on. You can say, well, yes, I'm fighting the agents of China. And similarly, you can exclude the public, which is a very important thing. There is one very revealing comment in the Pentagon Papers, about November 1964, I think, by William Bundy, if I'm not mistaken, where he's talking about the options being considered. They're all various techniques of aggression that they are planning. And he says it's very hard to carry out these calculations under the klieg lights of a democracy. And that's quite right. It's very hard to plot aggression in a democratic society under the klieg lights of a democracy. It's much better to be able to solve technical problems, where only the expert is allowed

to look because the public isn't called in on technical questions. The public isn't asked how a surgeon should carry out an operation. So if you can define all the problems that you are facing as technical you can not only accept absolutely idiotic hypotheses, such as the subservience of the Vietcong to China, but you can also accept for yourself the total exclusion of the public. You can turn off those klieg lights of democracy so that you can then go ahead and plot aggression in peace. And this contribution of technology, phony technology, of course, is a sort of quasitechnological mode of thinking which is very typical, by the way, of the academic intelligentsia who took that Eastern shuttle from Boston to Washington for many years. That is again, I think, another element that created the monstrosity of the sixties' policies. It still does, of course.

KERMIT LANSNER: The most extraordinary thing this year has been the president's trip to China. How would you analyze that journey, or do you think it's of such little substance that it's not worth talking about?

MORGENTHAU: On the one hand, the policy-makers have told us that we have been fighting in Vietnam in order to contain China. But if one believes that, then the presidential trip has deprived the war of its substance. It is an exercise in futility, even in terms of administration policy. On the other hand, it is of course obvious, and one doesn't need to emphasize it, that the normalization of our relations with China has been overdue for over twenty years. The president deserves credit for having had the courage, especially in the face of his own biography, to take that step, and perhaps only an unprincipled politician could have taken that step. Secondly, what the results of this adventure will be, that's a different question. I think that much too much has been made of it. We have been told, for instance, that during that week the history of the world has been changed and a new balance of power has been created. In truth, China is a potentially great power but is at the moment only a second-rate one, mortally afraid of the Soviet Union. And here we come to the point where Chou En-lai meets the interests of Richard Nixon. For Chou En-lai, presiding over a weak nation, needs the power of the United States in order to frighten the Russians. The Russians, any number of Russians, have told you, as they have told me, that war with China is inevitable. And the Chinese have made physical preparations for that war, dug air raid shelters, stored food, etc. They can now say to the Russians, if you touch us, you don't know what the Americans are going to do to you. They have a club now which they haven't had before. And the United States, of course, can play the same game, trying to use the Chinese against the Russians, and vice versa. There

is now an opening-up of movement among the super powers and China, a potentially great power, and it's an interesting game. But at the moment nothing tangible has happened, except the beginning of the process of normalizing our relations. And even this is very limited, because in view of the unsettled status of Taiwan, we are in no position of exchanging ambassadors.

CHOMSKY: I don't really disagree that much. Let me add something though. Just from the point of view of logic, you asked how this event relates to our various theories. It's sort of irrelevant to mine. That is, the proposal that I made predicts nothing either way about whether President Nixon should take a trip to China. So it has no bearing on that theory. During a period when the United States thought it was possible for a rollback in China, of course it made very good sense to try to build up pressures to create that rollback and to open up this area once again to American economic penetration. But I think that any rational person knew by the late sixties that that was hopeless. And it took what Mr. Morgenthau said, an unprincipled politician, to carry out the rational act of a member of the American ruling class. I should say furthermore that there are other elements. The military-industrial complex is a very important component of all of this which we haven't talked about. I mentioned that there are many factors, mostly mutually supporting, that lead to an imperialist stance. And one of them is the use, ever since the Second World War, of military expenditures as a technique of economic management internally. There are many reasons why that course was taken. And I think it is a natural course and one that will continue to be taken. But in order to continue to employ this very effective technique of inducing production and of economic management in the United States, namely a vast military system, you need an enemy, an external enemy, and the Soviet Union is a much more credible enemy than China. In a sense, it was irrational for American policy-planners to try to create the fear of China as a device for whipping the population into line to support a huge military budget. It's much more rational to do what Laird's doing now: to point to the Russian threat, which is not all that mythical, because Russia is a great power and it does have missiles and so on and so forth.

MORGENTHAU: "The billion yellow people wanting to take away from us what we already have" — I'm quoting. That's also very plausible.

CHOMSKY: No it isn't, because there is no way for them to do anything to us. The billion yellow people can't swim across the Pacific. But those Russian submarines, they can do something. So, therefore, I think it's sort of rational for the United States in its general pro-

paganda line to try to reconstruct the Russian threat of the 1950s as the basis of the next "missile gap," and "bomber gap," and so the next gap and the next gap. Notice that here, too, you have a very systematic error, just as in the case of the judgment of the control of revolutionary movements by foreign communists. Professor Morgenthau is exactly right in saying that anyone who believes that we were trying to wipe out the Vietnamese to stop China now has no rational basis whatsoever for believing that. So why don't they call the war off? Well, they are not going to call it off, because that was never the reason for it, it was only the excuse. That's quite different. In the 1950s, the motive was the threat, the idea, that a unified Vietnam would be successful enough to cause the rot to spread. That was the ideological threat. They never thought, I'm sure, that Ho Chi Minh was going to swim over to Indonesia and overthrow the government. That's not what they thought was going to happen. What they thought was that a unified Vietnam under communist control probably would be a model of some sort that would be mimicked by forces in Thailand and some other place. That was not entirely irrational. If you look at the intelligence reports of about 1959, they say that North Vietnam is developing a large industrial base. It's building for the future, and so on and so forth. In South Vietnam, there is much more gaiety and freedom, the report says. I don't know how they figure that out exactly. But it's not getting anywhere, just living off an American dole. That was the basis for the rational form of the domino theory; that was the "threat of communism." Not that the Chinese were going to march down and conquer Indochina. There was never any real fear of invasion, though Secretary Rusk may have believed that. I don't know. But the rational planners never expected that. They expected the domino effect to come through the ideological threat, which in fact they often talked about. Now, notice something very interesting. Say, in 1950 we supported France, because the U.S. planners said that it is "now clear" that there is a coordinated Kremlin-directed offensive to take over Southeast Asia. Well, in fact it was not "clear." They didn't have a particle of evidence for it. It was sheer nonsense. But, nevertheless, they said it is "now clear" that that is the case in the same NSC report that I quoted from earlier. In the 1960s it was clear, equally clear, that the Chinese were about to conquer Vietnam and that we had to beat back China. So that was clear that there is an American interest — perhaps even a combined U.S.-Chinese interest — in preventing Russian hegemony over Vietnam. So, what is "clear" keeps changing with very startling rapidity. But one thing stays common: namely, kill Cong. That conclusion re-

mains, no matter what the ideological structure behind it is. And the reason is we are really trying to repress that indigenous national movement.

MILTON PAULSON: Mr. Morgenthau, if you accept the premise that the specter of communism is haunting the ruling class of the United States, and that they would go to great extremes to prevent communism from being established in any other area, wouldn't it then follow that the actions in foreign policy in the American ruling class, far from being irrational and psychotic, are really quite rational? If they are covering it with this veil of hypocrisy just to deceive others, not themselves necessarily, wouldn't you say then that what they do is fairly rational and sane?

MORGENTHAU: Yes. It is as rational as an inmate of an asylum who assumes that he is Jesus Christ, and operates with perfect rationality from then onward. So if he believes that he is Jesus Christ, his actions follow from that belief, and his actions present an inner rationality derived from an utterly irrational premise.

MILTON PAULSON: From their point of view, is it irrational to make yourself wealthier?

MORGENTHAU: No. But then you go back to your previous hypothesis. You can assume that communism is a threat to the United States, ideologically and politically. But it doesn't follow that you have to engage in a hopeless exercise of suppression against a small nation which is engaged in a nationalist revolution under communist auspices. In other words, a threat may come from China, or it may come from Cuba or it may come from the Soviet Union, but certainly it doesn't come from North Vietnam, or from the Vietcong in South Vietnam. So, even if you assume for the purpose of argument the irrationality of the premise that communism is the deadly enemy of the United States which must be contained if not destroyed, it still doesn't follow that you have to pursue a policy that concentrates upon this little red spot on the map and forgets about everything else in the world. In other words, what is irrational is the extreme disproportion between the stakes of the conflict, which are very small, and the enormous means you have committed and wasted and vainly used for this purpose. This is bad foreign policy. It is also immoral foreign policy because the end sought cannot justify the means employed.

POEMS

TEXT FOR THE FALL APPEARANCE OPERA

The burgeoning scatter of black-
birds this dawn awoke
me: fall, which had not
yet appeared, appears & then begins
to disappear as one by one they leave
this place of many trembling,
precarious leaves, the turning
not yet done, not the flight
away, but the dance of these
leaves among my eyes.

PASSAGE

A ship moves close
to the shore in the night, running
lights catch the waves in,
the waves are drawing the shore
closer to the ship, everybody is
moving closer, nobody
sees they are moving
bodies on the water at night, drawing
closer to the moving ship, already
my body has moved with the waves reaching
in to the white shore, the ship rides the
swells in so I'm reaching it, near
enough so I hear the thump of
its motor through my body, so
its sound becomes part of the body I have
left standing on the beach.

ADVERSARIES

When is it I am not an adversary? A mosquito
whines around my head while I'm in bed
at night, I'm an adversary —
someone notices from my speech I'm from the East
& I become an adversary from the East to him,
he has heard of those eastern adversaries;
my tax dollars are adversary dollars, they put me in
an adversary position vis-a-vis the rest
of the world, it's a fact I have helped
to pacify, relocate, defoliate & terminate
as they say with extreme prejudice, in other words,
waste, words waste themselves like adversaries every day,
consider the "security" of "maximum security," actually not
a matter of being secure but maximally terrified & in
a hopeless position, with minimal security; or
"protective reaction," which protects nothing
least of all me, & is moreover a willful act
against imagined adversaries; but it's not necessary
to imagine adversaries, as when she says you are
reluctant or importunistic, & presto! I become
an adversary in the flesh, an aggressor within
the mind, perceiving the self in adversary
roles amidst scenes of carnage, rape, mutilation
& other offenses I am guilty of, it's all the same,
words or bodies, one will lead into the other,
in death as in love: when will I not be
an adversary? — if I were stabilized, would I not be
terminated? — vulnerable, would I not
be searched out & destroyed? — receptive,
would I not be instructed, ordered & trained
for the adversary life?

Robert Vas Dias

SELF-PORTRAIT

They no longer hold any hope
I'll fulfill my early promise
It's apparent now I won't be president
of the local bank
the United States
the regional sawdust factory
the Junior Chamber of Commerce the Rotary
or even a respectable member thereof

Very early I thought
I might succeed the Durango Kid
my profile wouldn't take closeups

Summers at the beach
I dug pits in the sand
waited for the Japs
but they never came
A hot bath on Sunday
a clean sailor suit
the pants were short
and I never went to sea

Fantasies of lingerie and Kotex boxes
the imagined purpose of women
We played doctor
of course
I was always the patient

I fumbled my way into knowledge
on a rainy night in November
I was scared she insisted
the windshield fogged
nothing mattered

At 17 Europe
The Grand Tour a little polish
a little *savior fare*
I told dirty jokes in ancient cathedrals
demanded spaghetti in Rome
told a whore in London
I'd a season ticket
I've regretted it ever since

At 14 I climbed
the tallest mountain in Wyoming
an astonishing feat
My mother worried everyone was proud
they sold my ice-axe and boots
I aspired to be an engineer
I passed geometry promising
not to take solid and trig
I come from an endless line of self-made-men
everywhere I look
opportunities and boredom

I contrive formalities to order my life
Experience dribbles through my fingers
I can't focus on the forms before me
The ceiling's no roof
the walls no boundary
My name belongs to a stranger
I've been led astray
by battered music
and even my respectable novel
wanders away into broken lines
I'm given to fits of idleness

Here is my biography
This is the section with pictures
See that's me the one with the hat
Here I am with my gladstone bag
the one who's smiling
that rubber-beach-toy smile

Dan Gerber

NATURE LECTURE

The fitch moves close to the ground
and humorlessly. Like a movie of itself.
Honor-bound not to divulge the ending.
You know how it is! the need
for secrecy. Path worn where no other paths
go; those claws, the cast of eye
backward, into limbo, or forward, into
madness. Once we thought a fitch
was a kind of weasel. Any way it moves,
colors confront it, images of past
lovers and children. It meets no pattern.

The fitch moves. Slowly, slowly,
a motion picture of itself. Or resembling
this picture in our guidebook.
As an unfunny comic strip: from the ears
sprout bubbles: you know the need
for messages! thumpings or spoor.

An odd ethic: not to reveal
even to itself/ that which claws in sharply
or moves, grindingly, as food.
In that terrible lair/ rest the soft bones
of unnamable offspring or animals
arranged in patterns on the earth floor.
This fitch takes itself quite seriously,
knows some forms as native
and others as acquired arts. See the eye
developing in upon itself, as years
pass quickly and no blood is exchanged.

The fitch moves. But its slow sound
is always the same, is
a sound track of itself, played and played.
We have to pause, book open,
to check its conformations/ to be sure
it is indeed a fitch, and this year.

Not that there is anything amiss in nature
if an animal is the same
year after year, maintaining
the same steady slowness, or the same sound.
It simply *feels* wrong. And it is by this,
after all, that we are able to
identify it, for our collection. We note
it does not go too fast for eye to follow,
like the ocelot. Yet somehow
this fitch is uncharacteristic,
even of itself. We are not used to *this*,
a known animal having unknown manners,
a slow animal being unpredictable
and therefore treacherous (not that we
think of one for a house-pet!)

When we least expect, it turns the mad eye
toward us, leaps and clutches, the book
goes flying, our slide-projector
spins and breaks against a rock. But then
the fitch moves slowly away. We can
retrieve the book, torn at that page,
shut it firmly, and move fast down the path,
utterly disgusted.

Carol Bergé'

ART, CULTURE AND CONSERVATISM

I

Richard Gilman

THE IDEA OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Art, seen in relation to its supreme destination, remains a thing of the past. It has hence lost for us what once made it true and vital, its former reality and necessity. — HEGEL

The history of art is drawing to a close. — HAROLD ROSENBERG

If art is always dying, there is never any scarcity of theories to explain why this should be so, but there is a shortage of insights into the states of mind in which the obituaries arise. Art hasn't yet died, and Harold Rosenberg is as likely to be proven wrong as was Hegel, that philosopher so intent on systems and abstract perfections that he was oblivious to what was happening almost in his very presence. In the 1830s in Germany Georg Buchner was writing plays that would inaugurate a new era of sensibility and that go on informing literary imagination to this moment.

There is something especially ironic about the charge leveled against certain critics of being "trendy" for championing new forms, when the really fashionable intellectual pose is that of a steely-eyed, not-to-be-taken-in defender of civilization against the new barbarians. The irony is of course compounded by the fact that these pundits at the parapets are mostly erstwhile evangelists for art and for new art in particular, and that in defending the past against the present and future they betray their own pasts and the nature of the human activity we call art or imagination or creativity, which whatever its transformations is not likely to die and whose essence is to change — which can look like dying.

What has been described as the new conservatism in the arts is a complex matter, at least as much a question of political and social stances as of aesthetic ones. In fact, there is almost nothing useful or relevant being said in the aesthetic realm by the new conservatives, who are masters of everything that had *once been* pertinent, which is to say they look at new artistic phenomena with the principles and from the vantage points of the past. More than that, they are engaged in jealously protecting the past, as though it were all there was, or rather as though if the present were acknowledged it would wipe out intellectual history and obliterate our imaginative heritage.

In a piece in this issue by John Bayley (which the editors permitted me to see while I was preparing this piece) the astonishing thesis is offered that the critic ought never to deal with contemporary writers, unless they have already found their "niches," in other words unless, their status and qualities having been fixed and assured; they are already in effect dead. Bayley's idea of art as a refuge or strong room in which to recuperate from life and gain perspective is one with which I have a good deal of sympathy, but to argue from this that only the art of the past provides such refuge is to make impossible any sane consideration of how art comes into being and affects us. For if Bayley is right, then art would always be produced for the future, artists would never be addressing their own contemporaries, and critics would be like scholars working away in museums. As of course so many savants who think like Bayley are.

But Bayley is not really thinking. He is reacting to what he and other cultural Tories, new or old, detest in the present atmosphere, its "nihilism," its "mindlessness," its contempt for tradition and for established (sanctified) forms and its hurly-burly insistence on striking out afresh. He is objecting to the "new sensibility," not least to its non-literary orientation, and like Saul Bellow, Philip Rahv, George P. Elliot and so many other defenders of the faith, he cannot accept that others may be at work, neither to endorse nor to anathematize, but to try to understand it. Nor can he see the deadly stasis which the new conservative position implies.

I would like in this essay to examine this curious state of arrest, to try to account for or anyway offer some possible light on the latest "art is dead" epiphany and, more cogently, since the chief current of the moment is not so much that art is dead but that only dead art is art, to investigate the belief that there is something called the "avant-garde" which is finished, that experiment is no longer holy and is even wicked, and that the chief malefactors are artists and critics who want to be "with it."

With what? Nothing has more widely corrupted recent intellectual and aesthetic discussion than the so-called assimilation of the far-out by the mass media. To grant that there are any number of poseurs and operators who are only too willing to be assimilated, that nothing is too extreme for *Life* and *Newsweek* to exhibit if not endorse, that *The New Yorker* publishes Borges and Donald Barthelme and television offers Grotowski and the Open Theater, that the powers of communications seem to make a plaintive bit of naïveté out of a plea like Gide's that he not be "understood too quickly"—to grant all this is not to have settled the question. For the critic it is really to have posed the issues: how do you distinguish the living from the stillborn, the personal from the appropriated, art from sensation? Where there is so much inauthenticity does anything authentic remain? And what is authenticity?

The thing I think we have to try to keep in mind is that the mass media haven't so much assimilated the avant-garde as surrounded it; and in that encirclement there is as little true understanding, as little recognition of what is being done by artists as there ever was in bourgeois society. The uses that are made of things don't always define them, although I would be foolish not to grant that creative acts are affected by the atmosphere surrounding them. But in any case the avant-garde hasn't been destroyed by the mass media; what has been injured, perhaps mortally, is an *idea* of the avant-garde, sometimes promulgated by its practitioners but more often by its camp followers, the idea that it is to be defined not by what it does but by how it acts, that it always moves directly against the social tide and by means of ever more intensive shocks and more extreme propositions, that it cannot (through some higher spirituality) be bought and that it exists to render the world speechless. Art will continue to be satisfyingly unsociable and new art even more, but there isn't any reason to think it a bad thing that the high-flying, quasi-religious righteousness of avant-gardism has been brought down to earth.

Fifteen years ago Richard Chase began an essay in this magazine by remarking that "it is the custom nowadays to pronounce the avant-garde dead." In the piece, which has often been reprinted, Chase went on to argue that at the very least the obituary was premature, as it had been so many times before, but probably would be in error for as far into the future as anybody could see. To broadcast it or give credence to it betrayed a lack of understanding of what the avant-garde is and does for, as he wrote, "the fact seems to be that under modern conditions the avant-garde is a permanent movement" upon

whose presence the health and indeed the fate of the general culture heavily depends.

Under modern conditions. If they have held reasonably constant, if what we understand by the term has remained coherent, then we ought to be in a position to make a judgment about Chase's judgment, to decide, a cultural generation after he wrote, how much acceptance we can still give (if we ever gave any) to his theories and whether, if what we call the avant-garde has really gone on showing a life, there is anything inspiring or efficacious in its doing so.

Is it possible to agree that the "modern conditions" Chase saw prevailing in 1957 have not disappeared but have intensified and spread? This is the assumption I begin with, anyway. Technology has deepened its bite and widened its grip. Television has pushed formally communicated experience further away from the verbal and literary and from the private to the public, and so has the recent flourishing of the kind of film that purports to be "where it's at." Education, bad then, is worse now, or at least a dismal awareness of its badness has become widespread. Politics, after a moment of seeming generosity and hopefulness, has become more estranging than ever. There have of course been new appearances: the black insurgency, the "counterculture," participatory democracy as a rough impulse, new cults of bodily awareness, the rehabilitation and dissemination of the erotic as a style of life and a kind of knowledge.

Yet these new phenomena, whatever their healing action may prove to be, have so far only exacerbated our condition. And what out of long habit we think of when we speak about the modern as a spirit and the time of our experience remains largely intact. A set of clichés, a wearisome catalog, perhaps, but not yet dislodged: alienation, fragmentation, the continual erosion of traditions, change as a first principle, the sense of the world as a place of unprecedented dilemmas and unheard-of enticements. Whatever is being drawn up to come next, we still feel ourselves largely defined by our distance from a simpler and, to the wholly nostalgic among us, a more "human" past, and yet like men and women at any time we are able to imagine the future only as the present extended, as the permanently modern.

But if the modern in Chase's sense remains, "modernism," its erstwhile towering system or principle of formal artistic expression, quite clearly doesn't. Looking around, it isn't hard to detect a widespread conviction that this time, after all the false alarms, the obituary Chase spoke of is accurate. Where art in the most general sense isn't held to be exhausted, no longer of any use, certainly the kind of art accepted in this century as high seriousness, the art Harold Rosenberg

has described as "the tradition of the new," is widely considered to have become extinct, or to have become merely a manner by which the recent past is aped or else, in a concession that really concedes nothing, to exist in writers like Beckett or Borges or musicians like Stockhausen, but in sterility and futurelessness, like a prince without an heir.

The "experimental," that which was once nearly synonymous with avant-gardism and was bathed in an air of intrepidity, takes its lumps in the journals—the *serious* ones—and is now thought cranky, eccentric, unattached to any living body of imagination. The imagination is itself distrusted and where it isn't decried is made to stay at home, kept under watch and handed domestic chores. The young new conservative editor of *The New York Times Book Review* extols Updike and sees Borges, John Hawkes, Donald Barthelme, William Gass, John Barth, Claude Simon, Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet as all having something "febrile" about their work, "a parodistic element . . . and irony so hyper-developed it becomes a form of suicide." Saul Bellow spends a day reading the literary quarterlies and is made "uncomfortable, then queasy, then indignant, contemptuous and finally quite bleak. . . ." Moreover, "reality" commends itself to the creative sensibility, not only to that of the young but also to that of many older persons who show signs of being exhausted by their years of struggle on behalf of an art and a literature that gained its soul from the refusal of reality, of the reality any naked eye could apprehend.

Oh, art has undoubtedly lost some of its former prestige, and avant-garde art, which gained its own prestige from being the only art that mattered, seems to have fallen on bad days. Yet was the prestige of the avant-garde very much higher at the time of Chase's essay? He was writing at a moment and in a climate which one might think looked nearly as inimical as our own to the flourishing of a vanguard. The Eisenhower years, the ostensibly silent generation, the apparent renewal of vigor and the consolidation of many bourgeois and "middle" values, the malaise caused by the Bomb: culture, as Chase said, seemed suspended, hovering disconsolately between the expiring impulses of the great contemporary movement and whatever new artistic and intellectual forces were gathering to replace them.

But the indications were bleak, particularly in literature, which was Chase's main concern. Thomas Mann, the last of the European colossi of the novel, had died two years before. In America, Hemingway, Faulkner and Cummings were all within a few years of their deaths and were creatively pretty much played out; Wallace Stevens had died the same year as Mann. There were only two literary phe-

nomena of any consequence in Europe: the existentialist, which was rather more a matter of philosophic redirection and search for morale and of literary purposefulness than of imaginative achievement; and "the absurd," which was almost wholly confined to the theater and which, moreover, represented the stage's catching up with developments that had long been visible in the other arts. The only presence in America was that of the Beats, which except for the poetry of Allen Ginsberg was a notably sad and ineffectual enterprise by any previous standard of literary élan.

Yet despite such grounds for pessimism Chase, a not easily stamped critc and obviously no trend-follower, offered his conviction that the avant-garde would sooner or later reassert its "recurring impulse to experimentation, its search for radical values, its historical awareness, its flexibility and receptivity to experience, its polemical intransigence." Such a litany of qualities and sources for action was, for that time or for any time, as complete an expression of faith in the avant-garde and as thorough a description of its adherents' conception of its nature and purposes as anybody could ask for. Disillusionment was setting in, but Chase was evidently not of its party.

There was a great deal at stake. Avant-garde art had come to be what kept civilization going in the face of its desire for sleep, its complacency and deadly entropic drift. It isn't too much to say that a step beyond Chase, in the most zealously evangelical circles, avant-garde art had come to represent what Victor Hugo, even before the modern era, had described literature as being: "civilization itself." Historically art had moved from a celebratory or archival function to guardianship of the very powers of human self-definition; and in the modern age, reversing the classic disposition of things, avant-garde art was what determined those definitions for society and people of consciousness.

The accelerating decline from this high station on the part of art and especially of literature, from which most had been asked and expected, a decline which as I hope to show may prove a very good thing, is one chief source of the present talk about the death of the avant-garde. It isn't that things have radically changed but that they haven't changed enough; the modern world has witnessed its own perpetuation, largely unaffected by the modernist sensibility, unaltered by the great novels and poems. A time comes when unmet expectations produce a reaction or even a revulsion — and this revulsion is a powerful element of the new conservatism.

This is the only way, it seems to me, that we can account for the peculiar note of rancor in so many recent pronouncements on the

state of the avant-garde by its one-time exponents and supporters. For, in addition to this rancor, which used to be the property only of declared and predictable enemies — passed-over artists and critics, upholders of the eternal verities, subsidized spotters of the barbarian at the gates, moralists and academic preservationists — we can observe something else even more surprising, and that is a tone of pleasure. The avant-garde is finished, done for, kaput; and people who spent years singing its praises and insisting on its necessity are rushing to help pile the dirt on the coffin. Well, rancor and pleasure in another's bad turn of fortune are marks of both the unrequited lover and the disappointed investor.

If avant-garde art is civilization itself or the principle on which civilization can go forward or be renewed (as successive waves of futurists of all descriptions have most ardently insisted) then something a great deal broader than aesthetic issues is clearly in question. In this idea of the redemptive or socially propulsive power of art, of which Chase's catalog is actually a rather restrained expression, one can discern that fusion or at least affinity of political and social energies, values and aspirations with literary and aesthetic ones which has characterized thinking and writing about the avant-garde ever since it became a self-conscious and publicly celebrated (or decried) activity, which is to say ever since it took on or, more accurately, was given a name.

We tend to forget, as the very term becomes an emblem or an epithet, that the notion of a vanguard implies an aggressive, military-like movement toward an objective, that it implies conquest. In the life of the avant-garde this movement may be seen as having been roughly divided into three parts or, to keep the military metaphor, columns. The most violently apocalyptic one was advancing toward nothing less than the full transformation of social, political and personal life, through imaginative exploration and discovery, the creation of opposing values, the reconstruction of consciousness and the erection of models for true, liberated behavior. A much more modest progress was toward the creation of alternate realms of existence, to be inhabited by all imagination-summoned refugees from modern social horror and psychic oppression. Young persons who during the twenties, thirties or forties, say, were struck by art like Saul by the Paraclete, fell mostly under one or the other of these two sways, as did the majority of humanist critics.

The third column, impelled by an even more total repudiation of the art of the past than the other two, yet notably chaste and "uncommitted," was moving into the elaboration of wholly self-contained

new artifacts, into an “aestheticism” whose orthodoxy is summed up in Malevich’s Suprematist Manifesto:

The difference between the new, non-objective (“useless”) art and the art of the past lies in the fact that the full artistic value of the latter comes to light (becomes recognized) only after life, in search of some new expedient, has forsaken it, whereas the unapplied artistic element of the new art outstrips life and shuts the door on “practical utility.” And so there the new non-objective art stands — the expression of pure feeling, seeking no practical values, no ideas, no “promised land.”

Such “useless” art would of course undermine the notion of the avant-garde as continuous since, having arrived at pure, noncontingent, unapplicable works, it would have to rid itself of all nonaesthetic categories, including those of progress, discovery and cultural renewal. This appears in fact to have happened from time to time, the outcome of a theory or not: with Mallarmé, *Finnegans Wake*, Mondrian, etc. And it is an element in the decline of the avant-garde, if not in substance then in public and critical estimation of its existence and vitality. For absolute art, or what would seem from the perspective of a confinement in time to be absolute — pure, nonmatrixed theater such as certain Happenings attempted to be, John Cage’s music, Ad Reinhardt’s Black paintings, Beckett’s *How It Is* — appears to many people to block artistic energy instead of renewing it, to obscure the human element in art and to make newness seem a kind of sterility or death.

Throughout the modern period there have been points at which many supposedly avant-garde cultural critics have refused to endorse the most extreme ideas and products of this impulse toward an almost wholly self-contained art or have drawn the line within the ongoing tradition of the new: *Ulysses* but not *Finnegans Wake*, Pollock but not Newman. For the entirely or chiefly aesthetic, art as autonomous and nonutilitarian, leaves society and general culture to their own devices and deprives cultural critics of any validated principle of commentary and interpretation.

This is why there has always been greater intellectual enthusiasm for a more usable art, one that *does* seek the promised land which Malevich’s pronouncement so strenuously repudiated. But as has been observed often enough, the responsibility for bringing about palpable new existence through a revolution in consciousness has been much too great for avant-garde art or for any kind of art to bear; it seems clearer now than when Chase was writing that it has never been the right sort of responsibility. But what hasn’t been seen so clearly, it seems to me, is that the great expectations that have been held out for

advanced and continuously advancing literature (to confine myself to that for the moment) haven't been maintained so much by the creators of the modern canon, its central and decisive ones at any rate, as by lesser figures, fervid and narrowly millenarian or acrobatic and ego-ridden workers at the fringes, and by certain critics and pundits for whom it is always difficult to see that art is strangely powerless, that it makes its countergestures to the actual power of the material world, to systems of value that originate in power and to chronologies of progress and myths of impending redemption.

Joyce, Proust, Mann, Eliot, Kafka, Yeats, Stevens, Faulkner, Rilke: none of them seems ever to have thought of himself as a *modernist*, although they were all aware to one degree or another of their peculiarly modern situation in relation to a radically and comparatively suddenly altered general culture, to tradition and the increased pressure toward new forms (a result of the stoppage of literature through its own internal piling up and of the usurpation — without comprehension — by bourgeois culture of the previously new), and to what had recently become expected of literature, its newly prophetic and quasi-religious function. They were conscious, in Stephen Spender's words, of having to "reinvent the world."

Yet they understood, as a great many intellectual critics did not, that these new worlds would remain inventions, imaginative increments (in Blackmur's phrase) or surrogate visions or revelatory structures of language, all of which arose from the most intimate connections with the world of physical events, moral questions and issues of power — what else is art's material? — but would leave all those things intact. And it was in fact the extreme political and often social conservatism — a matter chiefly of distrust of programs and solutions and of a wish, however misguided, to defend the imagination against social reality — of so many of the great figures of twentieth-century literature that disillusioned many of their troubled admirers and set going those great debates of a few decades ago (that have lately been revived in a somewhat less strident form) about the "responsibility of the artist" and on the question of how a radical aesthetic imagination can coexist with a nonhumanist or even an antihumanist politics and social belief.

In the case of the intellectuals we shouldn't be astonished that they have been far more eager that literature bring about recognizable human change and far more troubled by its failure to do it than the great writers have been. Intellectuals have always fought artists for ideal control of the latter's works, for the license to quarry fiction and poetry and drama for meanings and significances that might be brought over

into the "real" world to serve as weapons or tools. It is no accident that the best critics have generally been artists themselves, for it's a rare intellectual who can resist the pressure of the wish to be justified in his own right and who has the humility to take works on their own terms.

In his useful if somewhat schematic study *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Renato Poggioli has thrown important light on this matter. The intelligentsia, he writes, "has always denied, in a more or less direct and absolute way, the autonomy—even the *raison d'être*—of art. When the intelligentsia turns its attention, or renders homage, to a work of art, it almost always functions in terms of ideological adhesion, that is to say, it attaches itself to content. It tends, in general, to deny any creation in which the purely aesthetic principle seems to dominate. . . ."

The phenomenon Poggioli is describing operates most centrally in literature, with its greater concern with behavior and ideas and its more explicit social origins, and goes beyond political considerations, although it takes on certain of its attributes from them. Right-wing intellectuals or, more relevantly to American experience, radicals who have retrenched, have almost always distrusted the avant-garde; the left intelligentsia (outside Communist countries of course) has almost always theoretically and usually actively supported it. But what unites the majority of intellectuals of any political persuasion is their essential attitude toward the work of art, whether it is experimental or not: that it is there to serve in direct ways, to illuminate and help pave the way, to corroborate or console, to amend or conserve the world.

Alfred Kazin's essay, *The Function of Criticism Today*, written about the same time as Chase's piece on the avant-garde, eloquently expresses the prevailing ideology of the intellectual-critic who, like most other men and women, wants the aesthetic to be a function of something broader and more humanistic than a modality of imagination, wants it to be more useful, too. Criticism, Kazin wrote, should be concerned "explicitly, fightingly, with an ideal of man, with a conception of what man is seeking to become, with what he must become," and such criticism is in accord with "literature's classic function of providing ideas central to social policy and moral behavior."

Kazin has been too sensitive and open a critic ever to have been wholly confined to the implications of this position. Yet its coercions have existed in his own work and, with much more deleterious results, continue to exist in the writings of a number of other critics who came to consciousness in the politicized thirties, as well as in the work of a younger breed who write on films and drama and literature (and

even on music) as though these forms were nothing but (aestheticized) statements in the political or moral or social order.

If providing ideas central to social policy and moral behavior was ever the classic function of literature, which is certainly debatable, it hasn't been for a very long time. If it has provided ideas at all, literature in its modern or avant-garde phase has put forward thought (or imaginative structures from which ideas, necessarily paraphrased and so denatured, may be plucked) that has almost always run counter to entrenched social policy and to established or traditional moral behavior. This has in fact been one of the ostensible identifying marks of modernism, one of the qualities that have most commended it to intellectuals.

Of course Kazin might argue that in his definition the word "central" ought not to be understood exclusively as meaning "positive" or as being any sort of endorsement; ideas critical of policy and behavior may surely be central. Yet it seems to me that even such negative ideas — all those notions of inauthenticity and those perceptions of human malfeasance that go to make up what we have called the adversary culture — have in fact been thought of as being useful and thus positive; behind the destructive insights and the indictments lie the elements of a social policy and a moral system for the *world to come*, the world toward which the avant-garde is presumably and by definition moving and bringing civilization in its wake.

I don't think that this is what literature, at its most serious, has taken it on itself to provide, although it is unquestionably what it has been asked to do and even assumed to have done. I believe that as history, the history precisely of social and moral facts and events, has become increasingly irrational and resistant to ordinary sensibility, less and less plausible as the material of a human world, literature has at least partly been created out of an impulse to amend, to fill in the void, to erect existences in the realm of possibility — to reinvent all lost humanness (including the humanness of authentic dismay) and so construct a new and adversary history, something very different from an adversary culture. When Georg Buchner, with whom the modern age of literature begins in the 1830s, composed *Danton's Death* he quite deliberately fashioned a counterstatement to history, proposing nothing for the future, offering no solutions, simply throwing the power of his imagination against the power of the world and so, abstractly, "uselessly," triumphing.

In any case, out of the notion that literature's function is to serve social progress, however broadly defined, and that the critic's is to describe and analyze how this is accomplished, as well as to hold out

an ideal of the future for writers, notions against which, as we all know, the so-called new criticism, an enterprise largely of poets, aligned itself. Out of these notions have come all those superbly self-confident exercises in paraphrase and *rewriting* that have made up one source of criticism's contemporary but now moribund prestige.

The Waste Land as map of modern dissociation and fragmentation; *Remembrance of Things Past* as infinitely subtle document of social and psychological analysis; Kafka's tales as parables of modern political tyranny and the cold terrors of bureaucracy; Joyce's fiction as legends and artifacts of the centripetal flight of language, which is in turn a reflection of modern fragmentation — all such readings and exegeses are in fact concerned with establishing how literature reflects and analyzes the age and only incidentally with how it exists in its own right, as increment and as succor from time and facts. And this power of reflection and analysis is seen to be an instrument, a weapon in the struggle toward the future, for through analysis and reflection comes exposure, and to expose the world, to place on exhibition its delinquencies and outrages, has been what intellectuals have wanted from literature as much as they have wanted anything. And that is a very modern note.

The change in attitude toward the avant-garde on the part of its one-time champions is naturally enough presented as having an objective base: present day experimental or advanced writing is simply bad, shapeless, chaotic, nihilistic, above all lacking in that large coherent vision of experience and society that was one of modernism's hallmarks. The two considerations, what we are accustomed to call the thematic and the technical, are intimately related, as is always the case. This humane critical position on modernism held that technical innovation or experiment was in the service of the vision, and as long as there seemed to be a coherence between them, as long as it remained possible to *interpret* new forms, to translate them, that is to say, from the realm of aesthetic imagination to that of ordinary cognition (and of immediate usefulness, I would add) modernism remained exciting and was justified.

But the visions began to fail, the *big* novels and poems were no longer written, the confidence that seemed to characterize the modern masters began to disappear (from Joyce to Beckett). There are many reasons for this, not least important being the fact that literature has perennially to repudiate its own monuments, but the relevant point here is that it hasn't been avant-gardism that has fallen into disrepute so much as avant-gardism with its formal or aesthetic principles, its *literariness* stripped of the epochal and apocalyptic, to the front. The

astonishing distaste of American critics for the works of the French New Novelists, the refusal to concede that there could be anything original and valuable in these works, has always seemed to me a glaring instance of our critical provincialism and our demand that literature have "content."

This reduction of scale and renewed grappling with the nature of literature is what I think of as "post-modernist," which in other hands is an epithet to pinion a movement whose sinfulness lies in its failure to remain on the same high plane of "total" accomplishment as the works of the late masters and to possess the same high sense of "responsibility" for civilization and society and the mind as the latter were presumed to have had. What else can we make of indictments like those of Bellow and Rahv, who in the greatest of ironies inveigh against the current avant-garde (which they refuse to dignify with the term) in the name of the previous one?

Gigantic, immobilized, hieratic, the great modernist works stand in the consciousness of the new conservatives like enormous ice sculptures, filling all space, allowing nothing new to grow or be acknowledged. The disappointment they feel at literature's not having brought the millennium is compensated for by their nostalgia of equal pressure; the works they have enshrined have succeeded in arresting time and they live in this frozen chronology, striking out against the present, which doesn't exist for them.

It doesn't exist because literature, as they conceive of it, isn't being produced; only despicable scribblings, the work of imposters or monstrous adolescents, are. More broadly, art everywhere displays the signs of chaos and decay, is marked by ugliness, a pleasure in outrage, a spirit of the haphazard. It is indeed one of the signs of these times that writers, and painters and other artists, especially the young among them, throwing off the burden of the past — art's recent past — have put new claims on outcast objects (just as was done at the outset of the Dada-Surrealist period), turned away from "high" cultural perspectives and mocked the solemnity of those who still maintain them. "Trash" is a word in aesthetics now; pornography has its intellectual defenders.

Much of the impulse for these phenomena of a culture "lower" than seems ever before to have been granted status comes from a reaction precisely to the oppressions of high culture, of a former seriousness turned to stone. In the preface to his novel *Pornographia* Witold Gombrowicz writes: "We are 'infantalized' by all 'higher' forms. Man, tortured by his mask, fabricates secretly, for his own usage, a sort of 'sub-culture': a world made out of the refuse of a higher world of culture,

a domain of trash, immature myths, indefensible passions . . . a secondary domain of compensation." Not everything erotic or violent or "junky" in our culture arises this way, but the perception is a true one; in the generation after Gombrowicz what has happened is that this secret world has come to make itself public.

That there is something we might call *serious* funk or pop, earnest grotesquerie, is a recognition we have to make, in the face of the abundance of exploitation of the new mood. The Theater of the Ridiculous, for example, has been an enormously serious enterprise, mocking the frozen practices of drama and releasing new energies toward their thaw. Donald Barthelme's prose, made up of all our "polluted" vocabulary, all of what he calls the verbal "dreck" we have piled up, acts powerfully to create a new basis for language's health. So does Barth's writing and that of Peter Handke, whose plays and fiction come to us out of the literary tradition ("the avant-garde is always rediscovering a lost tradition" — Ionesco), but like the work of a mind amazed that language is what it is.

This kind of knowing naiveté, this tactical astonishment, is one condition of innovation. And this is what is lacking in those traditional writers (or those who have become *traditionalized*) who carry on as though all the resources were still at hand, as though language need only be approached with determination and large ideas about mankind in order for it to yield up literature. As though will can do the work of imagination.

The avant-garde is that element in the exercise of the imagination we call art which finds itself unwilling (unable really) to reiterate or refine what has already been created. In this sense there will always be an avant-garde, simply as a matter of the renewal of forms and the effort to make the imagination capable of new actions to meet new experiences. An avant-garde considered as a kind of salvation or one built on belligerence and contempt are historical accidents, not inevitabilities. What we might call the secularization of art, its chastening and the removal from it of the "values" that ought to be obtained elsewhere, are large factors in the apparent decline of the avant-garde. For stripped of its apocalyptic qualities, its competitive aspects and myths of progress — all characteristics that, as I've tried to show, have largely been imposed from outside — art takes on its simple and irreplaceable task of invention, invention in the order of possibility, invention that makes life known to itself.

Yet, it has to be asked, what of life's wanting to know itself directly, without the intervention of imagination or at any rate of imagination

organized in the formal, abstract ways that aesthetic reality implies? It's significant that at moments of political confrontation, of seemingly pre-revolutionary situations like the early thirties in this country and more legitimately, those weeks in France in 1968, radical cultural critics and even radical artists are overcome with guilt or at least shame at being avant-garde in the traditional sense. At such times they wish fervidly to move toward "life," which is to say toward everything nonhierarchical and antiaristocratic, toward everything practical and immediately efficacious. "Art is dead, let's liberate our day-to-day life," a graffito at the Sorbonne exhorted. And Alain Jouffroy wrote at the time: "I consciously and deliberately [ally] the elimination of esthetic values to the necessity and possibility of social revolution," and went on to say that "art is the armchair in which the State sits for its own pleasure."

Art as an impediment to the creation of the new society: this is the latest note. It marks the hundred-and-eighty-degree turn from the all-encompassing radicalism that was to revivify the world through total action (never mind the contempt for the unrevivifiable), when things seemed to hang together and it was a form of treason to the spirit to suggest that such stern choices were there to be made as perfection of the life or of the work. Art as a luxury and worse, art as inhuman, destructive, an abdication: the revolt in one quarter is against ideality, transcendence and the absolutism of the aesthetic, its insistence on the need for an alternative to ordinary experience and consciousness. And it's even more passionately against the aristocratic element of avant-garde art, its perfectionism and intolerance of the already accomplished. "Make it new!" and the newness seems to come into existence for its own sake and leave us gasping in abstract realms, disarmed in the struggle against the brutal facts among which we have to live.

Once again, I think this attitude isn't the wave of the future, although at the moment it has currency and a certain propulsion. Beneath the surface it represents one more aspect of the process by which art is being demythologized and denuded of its tendency to be a surrogate for the world to come, the one that doesn't come. An avant-garde that is simply art being new, not the world being made new, will go on. "In the long run," Nietzsche wrote, "utility is simply a figment of our imagination and may well be the fatal stupidity by which we shall one day perish." If at the moment it is what some of us think we have to live by, still one protection is precisely that continuing effort of imagination, that risk of the impractical, which may have lost its artificial prestige but not its value nor its necessity.

II

ON THE NEW CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

There is, we think, a growing conservatism in discussions of what's happening in the arts, and particularly in writing and thinking. A querulous tone is becoming increasingly apparent in the assessments of the tendencies and experiments of the past decade. One can see, too, a noticeable reluctance to receive new works, new writers, new forms, with anything like the generosity that might have been expected even five years ago. There is a marked suspicion of any deviation from the accepted notions of seriousness, as there is of any departure from the orthodox version of the mainstream.

Of course, a good deal of contemporary art does exploit the idea of the new, and does feed on the cult of immediacy. But the new cultural conservatism both exaggerates and revels in the failings of dissident and younger talents, and blurs the distinction between original work and radical postures; it inflates established figures, and celebrates old values, old works, old institutions as though they can never be changed or added to or replaced. Essentially it represents a hostility to anything exploratory, problematic, and disquieting, and it in fact often goes along with a rejection of the whole modernist impulse in art.

Conservatism does not always take the same form in culture as in politics, nor is the relation usually predictable. As we know, many "advanced" writers, like Dostoevski and Eliot, held conservative views. But there does seem today to be some correspondence between the political and cultural drifts to the right. There are contradictions, but usually the people and the publications that feel threatened by radical politics also feel at home with more familiar art, and with the culture of the past, particularly with that part of it which serves to bolster received values and ideals and to favor certain types of traditional themes and conventional structures.

We asked a number of people if they agreed with our sense of this situation. Did they think the stand we have described is a legitimate act of criticism? Or is it simply a nervous response, an attempt to reverse things by dismissing them? — a reaction of the kind that new cultural turns have always aroused. By whom and where is the new conservatism expressed? What does it mean for the immediate future of new writing, painting, theater, music?

The comments which follow are responses to these questions.

—THE EDITORS

John Bayley

When *Partisan* asked me to review a number of critical studies I was intrigued to find that the piece I produced struck the editors as typical of an increasing conservatism in academic and critical attitudes. It hadn't occurred to me specially, but the conservative is of course seldom aware of his bias: he may imagine himself to be open-minded, receptive, avid of new impressions and ideas. So today may the radical and revolutionary, with equally little justification.

To demonstrate the involuntary bent of my conservatism I decided to leave the review more or less as it was,¹ omitting some parts of it that are not pertinent to the issue that has been raised, and to preface it with a few prejudices which — on reflection — I find myself holding with full consciousness. They apply both to my own use of literature and the uses which, as a tutor at Oxford, I would like to see pupils discover and practice for themselves.

The main function of art is consolatory. It "calms and satisfies us" as nothing else can. Through it we live elsewhere: elsewhere than in ourselves, and elsewhere than in contingent and experienced existence. During its long evolution the European consciousness established a tradition of art as the safe or strong room in the house of consciousness, a shelter to withdraw to where awareness is refuted and nurtured, where it could experience and feel without getting hurt. This in reality is the assumption behind all European art, history and philosophy, and it is only seriously challenged at that point in the development of consciousness where the need of a refuge is no longer so strong as the sense that it *is*, after all, a refuge. This point has certainly been reached in the contemporary intellectual consciousness.

The need of a refuge is no longer so strong. In spite of all our talk about the violent and terrible times we live in we have lost or are losing the natural instinct and craving for a richer, more harmonious and proportioned world outside the grind of contingent experience — "another world than this." The traditional roles of art and of life have been reversed. Medicine, plumbing, eugenics — the whole processing sheath in which modern man lives — make him feel that it is *life* which is outside, and that art's function is to reach and reveal it. Our ego does not seek admission to the safe or strong room in the house of consciousness, but to the action scene, the place of cancellation, the place where it is going on. The function of art here is to shock and to expose, to insinuate and to threaten. Great art brings consolation but never wills it. And yet the modern artist often wills its opposite.

In the art of the past we do not meet ourselves, and so we add to and enrich our egos. We acquire "inner resources," those engagingly old-fashioned hypostases mocked in one of Berryman's wittiest and most despairing poems. "Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so." Perhaps less boring if we knew how to use art as an escape from it? But this is one thing we are *really* not allowed to say.

1 EDITORS' NOTE: The review as it now appears is a slightly cut version of the original.

It is significant that the campus young of today — those who can find nothing “real” in the literature of the past, or have never been put in the way of trying to — make a cult out of an imitation ancient work, Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Though they may not realize it, and might repudiate the book if they did, I suspect its chief appeal lies in its innocence, the false innocence of an anachronism. The true innocence of the past is something else again, an innocence which *King Lear* and *The Trojan Women* share with *The Rape of the Lock* and *Cranford*. It is the innocence of detachment, of an unawareness of ourselves, at the opposite remove from the necessary collusiveness of contemporary art. Modern art needs our egos as the drunkard needs whiskey: it must explain and justify itself endlessly to us, and we to it. Corrupting and corrupted by us, it can only function with the cooperation of our consciousness. Although, as Eliot observed, the art of the past is perpetually modified by the present consciousness, it retains the innocence of absence, of total noncooperation in the present event; and it requires that we modify and detach our consciousness when we seek its solace.

One of the great cant assumptions of our time is that art should expose us to life instead of protecting us from it. The young must be exposed, after Lawrence, to “the passionate struggle into conscious being”; after Sartre, to the viscous horror of the existential. No one suggests that the poor creatures need a respite from existence to equip them for the monotony and exigence to come and that such a respite — “a place of thought where we in waiting lie” — could well be offered by a course in literary studies. But professors think otherwise. So devout, or so conditioned, is Lionel Trilling’s acceptance of the contemporary assumption that he expressed amazement in his essay on the study of English that we and our students are not reduced to a neurotic jelly by perusing the works of Shakespeare and Dostoevski. He felt uneasy; he felt bothered; he felt our response — or lack of it — showed that something was wrong. So odd a misunderstanding of the status and function of the past could surely — to emphasize the point made earlier — only occur at a time when our consciousness of art as a place of refuge makes us ashamed to use it as such. George Steiner’s comments on art and the concentration camp reveal a conditioning as total as Trilling’s. He is appalled and amazed that mass murderers, brought up in the traditions of German culture, could continue to read Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin. But what on earth did he expect? Our need of escape, to which the greatest art ministers, is far far more easily achieved through it than is the smallest moral decision or modification of our normal behavior.

And in the interest of art and ourselves it is right this should be so. A tyrant who abdicated after reading the Bible or Buddhist doctrine is at least a possibility: a tyrant who did so after reading *King Lear* would be an anomaly. He would be missing the point, discrediting the mystery, making an ass of himself. So, if it comes to that, would a student of literature who at once sat down to write a play inspired by *King Lear*. And yet literature courses in America, and increasingly in England too, not only mix the study of literature with “creative writing” but suggest that the main function of literature is to teach us to write — not to write good clear prose like a civilized man, but to write creatively. If you

read books in order to write them, art becomes an endless circle in pursuit of the self, instead of a discovery of the safe place or strong room at one side.

This concept of literary studies as shared performance is something I would disagree with in Richard Poirier's subtle and shrewd essay in *The Performing Self*, "What Is English Studies?" Poirier asserts and qualifies with an open mind; he is not conditioned by the contemporary; but I think he is wrong in going along with the present view of literary studies as a sort of challenge to personal dynamism. A wise — and solitary — passiveness would be a better receptive mode. Reacting to modern literature, and vying in violence of reaction, has become a campus game; and though we must not see art as escape we are encouraged to participate in it with a "togetherness" which is a much more vulgar — and I would have thought ultimately less effective — way of evading our isolated and alienated state. We should escape in art into a true corporate being, the being of inherited civilization.

There is of course both complacency and fatalism in my comments. Not being able to put the clock back is the formula with which one both congratulates oneself on one's conservatism and comforts oneself for its lack of reality. But on the level of literary studies there is something that could be done, and that is to assert with confidence the escape value of great literature, the solitude in which it should be enjoyed, the pleasure in discovery for its own sake and in learning the language of the past for its own sake. In university studies the present should be left to look after itself. Who knows but that, after a little patient trial and error, the student may not again find in a backward-looking curriculum an asylum from life no less pleasurable and ultimately more rewarding than the trips now offered by demos, acid and pot? Then he will be living in life and escaping into literature, instead of seeing literature as some kind of more exposed and demanding life in which it is his duty to play a part.

The critical books I was reviewing divided sharply into two categories: books about the literature of the past, and books about the para-literature, or hypothetical literature, of the present.² (Miss McCarthy is fond of treating the past as if it were the present, with results we shall notice later.) Richard Gilman and Mary McCarthy are both excellent critics, but they are also observers and followers of the fashion; they devote their most considered efforts to what will not stay quiet in its place, and for this reason a collection of their fugitive pieces from the last few years does not wear well. Peter Brooks and Leo Bersani, on the other hand, are concerned in their studies of the French novel with what is gone and remembered. Their *Crébillons* and *Balzacs* will not run away, but *Sontag* and *Mailer* may be gone tomorrow, leaving the observer of letters stranded in his judgment.

2 THE WRITING ON THE WALL. By Mary McCarthy. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$6.75; THE CONFUSION OF REALMS. By Richard Gilman. Random. \$6.95; THE NOVEL OF WORLDLINESS. By Peter Brooks. Princeton. \$9.50; BALZAC TO BECKETT: CENTRE AND CIRCUMFERENCE IN FRENCH FICTION. By Leo Bersani. Oxford. \$8.50.

He may of course have been right at the time, for what that is worth. "The moral charge against Miss Sontag," comments Richard Gilman, "which is mainly a charge against the kinds of art she is interested in, issues from the same morale such charges always do: apprehension in the face of new consciousness." Gilman's readiness to champion the new consciousness can mean little to us now. Her pronouncements may have modified the course; she may still be spoken of in the smoking-room; in a hundred years her contribution to the *Zeitgeist* may even be studied by scholars. But in the here and now she is both explicated and ingested: the why and how about her are no longer questions.

Still more so with *Macbird*. At the time Gilman called it "an appalling thing to have in our midst," degrading protest into a narcissistic carnival. The general point remains valid, and we can salute Gilman's sense while we have forgotten the evils it went up against — we have enough new ones of our own. We hear that Elizabeth Hardwick judged *An American Dream* "an intellectual and literary disaster," but Gilman could not bring himself to be so easily dismissive.

An effort to see it as something more calls on us to see how catastrophe may retain its own face yet become, through the matter's particular risks and significances, a kind of strange triumph, a new, maimed heroism.

I suspect Gilman is really saying that Mailer's catastrophe — like all such in literature good and bad — is to be escaped into and indulged in; but we could not escape into the literature of the past if we felt its authors were indulging themselves simultaneously in the same way. And what, incidentally, were the particular risks of this matter? The author does not run risks in writing but in living, as do we all; but the notion of a communal shared *risk* in literature is typical of our modish dynamism about contemporary art. Live dangerously, boys — see a *film*! Note, too, the face-saving of "a kind of strange triumph" paired with the compulsive genuflection of "a new, maimed heroism." Gilman's brave acceptance merges into Miss Hardwick's dismissal until the eternity invoked by Mallarmé at the tomb of Poe — *Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change* — has told its truth about Mailer. For when Gilman has eternity at his disposal, when he is writing about Strindberg or Ibsen, his academic virtues burst into flower and he becomes the master of his subject as Brooks and Bersani are masters of theirs.

Miss McCarthy's essays on Salinger and Burroughs are fine performances of demolition and placing, but here again the focus of controversy is blurred by too brief a time lag. How right she is about "the closed circuit" of Salinger, where the medicine cupboard is a character and the Glass family is "its own best audience" (as Norman Mailer is ours). The intellectuals also seemed right in 1880 when they dismissed Dickens because everything in his novels was "a character." She admits that *Naked Lunch* is coterie literature for addicts and former addicts. *Oblomov*, when one comes to think about it, was once coterie literature for Russian rentiers, but it escaped with time into a wider context and grew in an unexpected direction. Burroughs's "basketful of crabs" may proliferate in the same way, but if so it will have nothing to do with our present critical assessment of him.

It may be significant that the best essays in *The Writing on the Wall* are on writers whose position seems already given — Nabokov and Ivy Compton-Burnett are already in the niches they are likely to occupy permanently. “A Compton-Burnett is a reliable make . . . production is steady . . . turning out Compton-Burnetts as someone might produce ball bearings. (Dickens produced Dickensses, but Flaubert did not produce Flauberts.)” On these authors Miss McCarthy does not need to be assessor: with inimitable ease and authority she explains the puzzle and shows us round. She is less happy when covering a lot of ground.

“Saint-Simon, had he turned to the novel, might have been the French Fielding, and provided the model for a comic epic in prose.” Taine had concluded that the eighteenth-century French novel was a less faithful mirror of the times than its English equivalent because the *monde* it portrayed was universal and coercive, the sole and exclusive model of social life. Brooks is concerned to analyze the significance for French fiction of this doctrine of *le Monde*, and to indicate its capabilities: the tension and concentration of an intricate card game in which the rules are known and accepted. In Crébillon, Duclos and above all in de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the will of the *esprit fort* dominates the scene; the audience watches the game — as Miss McCarthy likes it to do — it does not identify with the players. Brooks points out the exhilarating revolution that Richardson — closely followed by Rousseau — brought about in this claustrophobic world. Diderot, devouring his beloved Richardson, declared he would “willingly give his life” to resemble Clarissa, and would “rather be dead” than be like Lovelace. “Such a reaction,” says Brooks, “is utterly different from that provoked by the distanced, witty, evaluative tone of the novel of worldliness.” And in Richardson we participate not only with the characters but in the dense contingent mass of object and event that make up their lives, so that, to quote Diderot again, “his pages abound in what may be called *instantaneous* descriptions and reflections.”

In the nineteenth-century novel the *monde* is not to be obeyed but to be conquered, perhaps transformed; while the powerless ego is no longer able to draw activity and confidences from the known morale of the game, but is exposed to all the demoralizing hazards of fantasy and ennui, the hazards that undo Emma Bovary. This is Professor Bersani’s world, the world in which — as he puts it — “we encourage people to be themselves.” His complex and detailed inquiry into the role of the self in Balzac, Flaubert, Proust and later novelists is fascinating, and his conclusions very largely convincing. He is particularly good on Camus, whose confusions — arising out of the French inclination to take the language of their metaphysics very seriously indeed — he reveals with insight and sympathy.

Bersani is particularly interesting on the *nouveau roman*’s attempted extinguishment of the self, and the self’s comeback in ways which Bruce Morissette has also analyzed in a study of Robbe-Grillet’s novels. Most intellectually premised fiction today is striving to find ways of asserting or rediscovering the privacy of the self, while the more spontaneous kind lays the self ever more shamelessly and importunately before us, longing to confess with Norman Mailer that it was the one that “wet the floor in the men’s room,” and so forth. Thanks to the modern

novel we seem in danger of melting together in the same undifferentiated mass, and even Robbe-Grillet himself has betrayed (as one would have thought) the craft premises of his fiction by praising this kind of invitation to communal subjectivism. But the interesting thing is that confession should be by its very nature an alienating form: we cannot — certainly do not wish to — identify with someone who insists on laying himself before us. On the contrary, we find our universalness in the art which offers us — which has the rituals to offer us — privacy. However universal, the experience of, say, *Macbeth* is an intimate and a private experience: the experience of Mailer is a degradingly public one from which we do right to recoil.

Norman Birnbaum

Aesthetics and politics are separate realms of existence — separate, but connected. The mediating structures are many: modes of sensibility, structures of sentiment, depictions of the moral order (or disorder) of the world. Mediation, further, may work by negation. Art is fascinating precisely in the light of its distance from other realms, its inversion of their constraints. Different forms of art have different sorts of political reference. The political significance of a novel is more easily apprehended than that of an abstract painting, of a play more intuitively than of a string quartet. The direct reproduction of reality must of course confront politics — but the confrontation may well terminate in adaptation, accommodation or capitulation. An art with a political theme is not necessarily radical — even if there are situations in which a depiction of life in terms other than its routine and surface aspects constitutes radicalism.

Radical intention, however, does not guarantee aesthetic achievement. I have been struck, in reading American fiction emerging from the political movement of the past decade, by its general lack of aesthetic quality. Technically, some of the newer novelists are poor cousins of Dos Passos. The inner lives of their protagonists seem to be flat, torture comes from without, from what the social scientists term “role conflict.” The term itself expresses an abominable foreshortening of perspective, comprehensible in academic disciplines which hawk standardized perceptions — but inexcusable in art. The description of society as a system of external constraints, of conventions as barriers to social fulfillment, is so pervasive that the subject disappears. If I have correctly understood contemporary French aesthetics, an enormous preoccupation with the subject — as unknown territory — dominates reflection. In New York, then, an objective world terrifying in its facticity; in Paris, a subjective one infinite in its structures. Our writers attempt to encompass politics, the French ones to move beyond it. The situation is practically its own parody. The terrible pressures of the social order, which make of some American writing a kind of asocial-

ist realism, in France force art onto a terrain so ferociously defended, so rigorously defined, that it becomes a realm apart. A hideous life opposes a life-defying art.

But what has become of the principle I uttered some paragraphs ago? Art as a realm entirely separate from politics caricatures the inner life, exists in a willfully created realm devoid of any meaning but one imposed upon it. Art defined exclusively in terms of politics makes of the inner life a crude reflection of society — and minimizes or eliminates the structures of aesthetic experience. Perhaps we come closer to a solution of the problem by recognizing that politics may set the conditions in which aesthetic experience is possible. A large definition of politics is necessary, politics as the organization of the common life.

In societies like our own, the common life is hard enough to find. All kinds of surrogates — some of them frenzied, others embarrassingly inauthentic — have not quite filled the vacuum. Perhaps there never was a true common life. History as the history of multiple alienations, of domination and exploitation, allows of no sentimentalizing. Some epochs, however, were sufficiently unified in spiritual substance for a common aesthetic discourse to develop. One of the peculiarities of our own is the impossibility of common discourse — in nearly everything. A general politics, in these circumstances, is almost equally impossible: consider the failure of western socialism. It is absurd that some should wish to make art bear a burden doubly staggering. It is supposed not alone to interpret our experience, but somehow — as a political force — to redirect it.

Art is a realm of freedom, in that it points to possibilities unrealized (very possibly, immediately unrealizable) in social existence. When the freedom of art depicts possibilities of a realizable kind, the political dimensions of art become salient, if not paramount. Politics and aesthetics still remain separate. The function of art is to concretize in an object a universal element of experience. The purpose of politics is precisely the opposite, to generalize or universalize a concrete segment of human experience. Let us take a utopian definition of politics, as the formalization in rules of sentiments of affinity and fraternity, love and compassion. Even on a utopian note, art and politics are structurally different.

Aesthetic conservatism may have radical implications. The late Theodor Adorno once said that the defense of bourgeois humanism had critical consequences in late capitalist society. Bourgeois humanism was obsolescent — but its obsolescence illuminated the contradictions and deficiencies of the society which claimed unbroken descent from it. The term “obsolescent” merits attention. Values which no longer can take concrete form may well be obsolescent, but it does not follow that their historical successors are either more profound or more sublime. History may record decline as well as secular triumph. Conservatism may be less frightening if we ask if there is anything that is worth conserving — and if we ask, as well, whether it can be conserved. In America, at least, what is there to go back to? We have had a simulacrum of an educated middle class, now replaced by college graduates — a category identifiable with difficulty with the possession of culture. In societies

which have had a bourgeoisie, the chief cultural characteristic of the years since 1914 has been the relentless and systematic liquidation of bourgeois culture. Witness the current disturbances in the British, French, German and Italian academic secondary schools — extraordinary in their extent and intensity. (A French lycée professor who can hold the attention of a class is thought to be a cultural virtuoso.)

Is there anything to which we may go forward? The experimentation of much current art does at times constitute an irreducible exercise in the refusal of form. More, a principle — if that is the term — of moral randomness infuses much of what passes for avant-garde art. It is not the systematic pursuit of a new morality, it is not systematic amorality, it is not the antimorality of great antibourgeois art, the destruction of illusion. It is the denial that there is either illusion or reality, morality or evil, a surrender to an instant reified — so terrible, so binding, so total that all else is declared nonexistent.

Alternatively, we encounter a play of elements and techniques, developed with obsessional attention to detail and (equally obsessional) flight from meaning. Rules of the game are invented ad hoc, for a public which once initiated can be titillated by or with other games, other rules. Early modern art insisted on fidelity to the medium, but what we experience is something else: the willful destruction of the medium, a refusal of form as the only formal principle left — and that, too, in an absurdly self-conscious, self-caricatured way. In a remarkable book, *The Open Art Work*, Umberto Eco analyzed the essential element of modern art as its imposition of a task upon the public: its completion in the mind. The truly modern work, then, requires not a passive public but an active one. It is impossible to believe that this requirement can be met by, for instance, spitting back at the members of the Living Theatre. Openness as a formal quality is perhaps too narrow a criterion to generate authenticity. We get further if we conceive of openness as a formal invitation to interpretation, as a demand that the public bring resources to the work. The quality of effort, of discipline, of work itself in the reception of aesthetic communication distinguishes it from mere consumption. A good deal of the current aesthetic discussion, however, makes no distinction between art and vulgar economics. In a perfectly mechanical analogy, the artist produces and the public consumes. No wonder so much that passes for art may be subsumed under the criteria of market behavior!

Cecil Brown

BAD WRITING, OR unclewillieandthebadpoet

Time: Present.

Place: Bad poet's pad, the white man's books decorating his walls, eighteenth-century gilded wall-length mirror (fake); two rare tropical plants on either side of the custom-made sofa; to the right, a den for resting, and a view — a view of everything. The writer is at his typewriter. In front of him is a picture of two Scandinavian blondes. On his desk is a Norelco tape recorder and next to that is Ulysses by James Jones (Joyce, 'scuse me) and next to that Charles Wright's The Wig.

There is a knock on the door.

BAD POET (*in the middle of things*): Hey, Uncle Willie! My old uncle from the country! What are you doin' in Berkeley! Why, I was just sitting down to write you, but I got distracted with this . . . uh . . . inquiry from these white boys . . . (*he glances at a piece of paper in his hands*). *Partisan Review* wants "A Statement on the New Cultural Conservatism" and I wrote back and told them I'd give them one.

UNCLE WILLIE (*looking around with buck-naked curiosity*): Lord 'a mercy, it looks so good in here, Robert! This place looks like a white person lives here!

BAD POET (*with his ass on his shoulder*): Well, you see, Uncle Willie, that's what happens when you become the mirror of your time. The black is a mirror of the white; that's where we get the concept of theater. Hamlet had it right! He jived the king and thereby found the truth!

UNCLE WILLIE (*well known for his patience*): Look, Bob, you go ahead and write. Don't let my coming here interrupt you! I haven't seen you in fifteen years. I can wait another fifteen minutes.

BAD POET (*getting it together*): Sit down, Uncle Willie, and I shall read to you from my essay in which I explain the fault of the old literary movement and issue in the new. The title is: "The White Man's Literacy to Which Black People Are Still Enslaved." In the new literary style — only the comic is serious. Every serious writer, like Mr. James Baldwin and Saul Bellow, lives in bad consciousness because life is never as bad as they make it: it is worse. That's why we need a new form for the new content. When this happens everything will look brighter. We will rejoice and be filled with sunshine. New writers

will emerge, and the old men will take their places beside their dead predecessors.

We have been exploited, Uncle Willie. I want to tell you: every major white writer in this country, including Jewish writers, have used us. In an effort to get a wider reading public, the following writers exploited the black revolution — all of them exploited the new rise of black language, which devoured their pitiful inheritance from Henry James: Saul Bellow, Mailer, Tom Wolfe, Bernard Malamud. As Mr. McLuhan puts it: "It is part of the age-old habit of using new means for old purposes instead of discovering what are the new goals contained in the new means." This is the book formula for best sellers and, not surprisingly, the formula for the latest Hollywood film. And I shall show, dear Uncle Willie, that the origin of the new Fascist tendency in Hollywood which Miss Pauline Kael is always warning us about is none other than the failure of such intellectuals as Mr. Saul Bellow, who, specializing in his own profession, as most mass-men do, from elevator operator to book editor, refuses to acknowledge the influence of other media on literature, thereby sanctioning the irresponsibility of his literary cousins in Hollywood. Like one of Poe's dead women, Hollywood (*Straw Dogs*, *Dirty Harry*, etc.) comes back to haunt the white intellectuals for not doing their job, for not laying her to rest once and for all. Hollywood learned the method from "best sellers" like William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*. The formula is to write about something black but to try to relate it to the tradition of literature. It is very much like putting new black energy into old forms. It is still going on very strong in Hollywood now, and there is little reason to believe that it will stop. In Hollywood, black actors and writers are controlled by white promoters. I know because I was there for two years, Uncle Willie, and I got names and addresses. I got stories that will make you tremble, and every time I hear the words "black power" now I want to throw up. I ask myself, why do black people allow themselves to be treated like that? After the black revolution we have white people exploiting not only the black man in the ghetto, but also the black man in Hollywood, which, to be sure, is not much more than a slum! Why would not any black man see that the black revolution existed solely for the benefit of white people (who were promised by black, white, and radical intellectuals more orgasms) and for white promoters (who saw it coming and took it for all it was worth and are still doing it). But, Uncle Willie, I'm getting too serious. It is not my style. Let me read you my essay!

The black revolution was a cover for the white boy to see if he

could get *his* shit together. The white boy couldn't live the white history any more, which is the history of daylight consciousness. He had to discover the unconscious history, which is blackness; he had forced black people since the time of Egyptian civilization to live the history of unconsciousness, of night. He used the black power movement as an excuse to attempt once more to regain a sense of identity. The great joke on Wright, Baldwin and Ellison was not the black man in search of identity. Black people knew who they were — they knew that it didn't matter. The invisible man was the white man who didn't know what black people thought of him and still doesn't. Black history didn't help him any, because it followed the same rational patterns as his history did. He wanted black poetry, but all he got was poverty programs. He wanted paradox, and all he got was riots, which, really, were so familiar to him that he thought he was reliving *his* history — something like having two nightmares in one night. Any black man as an intellectual has advantages on white liberals that would astound you, Uncle Willie —

UNCLE WILLIE: You make me believe it, son.

BAD POET: Saul Bellow and Morris Dickstein said that I was influenced by D. H. Lawrence, but it is the other way around.

UNCLE WILLIE: Who was D. H. Lawrence?

BAD POET: A nigger-lover of the highest degree. An even greater nigger-lover than Mailer, who in his literary style wishes he were black; Mr. Bellow's literary style wishes he were white. Dear Uncle Willie. I must tell you this; I had almost forgotten it. When I was a student at the University of Chicago, where Mr. Bellow was teaching in the department of Social Thought, and I went to see him about getting into his class, he told me that I couldn't because it was full, and then added: "Why don't you try next year?" I was disappointed. Well, a couple days later, a friend of mine, one of those blondes from Vassar, rolled over in the bed and said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you, I got into Bellow's class today."

UNCLE WILLIE: See there! Nigger, I told you that was what the revolution was about!

BADASS POET (*brightly*): Ah! No wonder Mr. Bellow is so angry at us! He probably wants to be on television too! But, anyway, here, at last, is my essay: (*he reads*) "Some months ago, *Modern Occasions* asked Mr. Saul Bellow to talk about American Literature. Asking Saul Bellow about contemporary literature is like asking Bill Cosby about black people on television. Everybody knows that black people on television make a mockery of their people. They take roles about black people who are really white, they speak a white (or television) language, and yet, we still use them as images of ourselves. Bill Cosby

is not going to cut his own throat, and Saul Bellow is not going to cut his. Each of these men in his own neat division of specialization (the main characteristics of mass culture), and just as I can never talk to Bill about novels, so I doubt I could ever talk to Saul Bellow about television. Bill Cosby is saying 'Look, man, I am Mr. Black Television, dig it!' Saul Bellow is saying, 'Look, nigger, I am Mr. Printed Page, Mr. Contemporary Literature, etc.' And so Cosby gives us a dim-assed picture of the black man, so Saul Bellow gives a desiccated view of the literary man. Now one of the most dangerous elements of our society today is men such as Saul Bellow. He would advise us to make division in genre where there is no division. He would have a man waste his time and energy with foolish and nonsensical trivial distinctions between 'literary situation' and 'literary element.' Between 'intellectuals' and 'publicity intellectual' — between himself and death. Why does he do this? It is very simple. Mr. Saul Bellow has an invested interest in a reactionary vision, because this is how he makes his money. His books are conventional books, and for people without a sense of what they want, these books are good. His last book is about an old Jewish man for whom black people are exhibitionists. (Mr. Bellow — Look!) It is only by experiencing media change that we are able to judge the reality of the past. Memory is influenced by the media. For example, now that we have the white people exploiting us in the so-called black films, we are able to see the reality of role-playing in the so-called black revolution. The Black Intellectual can see a certain pernicious element of blackness in the movie *Shaft*. Such a movie, along with *Sweet Back*, gives the real attitude that America had toward blackness during the sixties: an attitude of exploitation and jive. How can a black man not rail against this?

"Despite his success as an author and his bevy of graduate students each year — how can any man go on year after year preaching the same shit, or writing the same shit for that matter? — Mr. Bellow seems envious and jealous of his betters, like Marshall McLuhan. His essay gives us neither insight, intelligence or humor. Reading his prose is like 'scuba diving at Coney Island in urinous brine and scraps of old paper, orange rinds and soaked hot dog buns.' He invokes *King Lear*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Waste Land* — not in an effort to offer insight, but rather, to stack his argument. In that essay, Mr. Bellow's style reminds me of a politician."

All of Black History is a joke to white people in Hollywood. (*turning back to his essay*) "Mr. Bellow attacked a poem by LeRoi Jones in which he is quoted to have said that the black man will survive America. Mr. Bellow said the poem was 'Halloween childishness.' But what Mr. LeRoi Jones meant in his poem was that the

survival of the black man would mean the death of America. He meant that the survival of the 'primitive, tactile art and kinetically charged rhythms' will be the death of the liberal, literate, stereotyped, professor-type who aspires to be imprisoned by print. Now this has already happened. It is very sad for black intellectuals that the only way they can be appreciated as intellectuals is that they become as uptight with the printed page, and cannot themselves see that blackness is being taken for a ride. All over America white people are dying as white people, and surviving as black people.

"During Frederick Douglass's time literacy had more to say about a slave's freedom than anything else. To be able to express one's self with 'eloquence, reason, and logic' (in other words, to be able to talk the white man's language) gave one great cause to be free. This is true today, for men imprisoned physically. Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson learned the technique of literacy and saw the value of being a 'writer.' Only white liberals believe that these men are different from thousands of prisoners across this country; they were simply men who distinguished themselves by the man's media. In a post-literate age, as McLuhan calls it, we have distinguished men like Saul Bellow trying to intimidate other writers with his fascist, cultist notion of 'good writing.' Who cares about 'good writing' but the mass-man masquerading as an intellectual? The mass-man, Elémire Zolla writes in *The Eclipse of the Intellectual*, 'remembers all radio and television programs, the ratings of all the athletic teams, the distinctive features of the various kinds of cars. . . .' Why? We would search in vain through the list of vices and virtues for the incentive which propels him to cram so much garbage into his memory. To understand it, we must go back to the training methods of the German army. One of the 'systems to break the will,' in fact, one of the most efficacious, was the torture of 'senseless commands': force the soldiers to wake up in the middle of the night and run to empty the water from one cistern into another, using mess tins or cups. . . . *Mass-man applies this military device willingly to himself: by dint of carrying out useless mental operations, cramming his mind with superfluous information; he is protected from the emergence of dangerous questions and emotions* (emphasis added).

"Like some slave master, or German soldier, Mr. Bellow would have his young intellectual followers acquiesce in their virtual prison of printed page, in their sanctuary of good taste — easy, white virtue."

UNCLE WILLIE (*interrupting*): Hurry up and get to your point. I'm tired of listening to you sounding like you white, sonny.

BAD POET (*of two minds; reads*): "One of the importances of any social movement is what it teaches us about the symbolical nature of lan-

guage. Language as a technology is constantly changing and no one changes language like black people in America. Not even Shakespeare, not to mention a Norman Mailer, or a Saul Bellow. They only copy black people. Symbolically, the Black Power Movement was a new surge of language into the lethargic middle class; symbolically, black people helped to sustain the illusion that white America's values were still viable, and that's why there has been a new return back to their old values. Once again Black people have, in their thirst to be 'free' (i.e., to possess whatever it is that will identify them as anything but a complete black person), to embrace the old values with such fervor that white people also find new meaning in them. Hollywood is good for another thirty years now that black people have moved in.

"To combat this, the new style must be radical. It must be new not only in content, but form. It must contain paradox as one of its stronger weapons. We must stop fooling ourselves about 'good writing'; there is no such thing. All 'good writing' is bad as Shakespeare proves. The young writers should feel free (especially black writers) to write bad plays like John Ford's *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore*, or create bad characters like Shakespeare's Aaron the Moor, and give Othello that long rest he needs. Plays should be written about television commercials and films. These things which we can't criticize in the printed page because they get involved with the printed medium, should be made into plays; so we may share them in the community. A play about the blues genius Robert Johnson, from whom Mick Jagger stole songs (as an image of the white man's stealing from the black culture which Mr. Bellow despises) and about how Mick Jagger later kills that black kid in that Altamont Concert, where the black kid turns out to be Robert Johnson. This is, of course, true already on a symbolic level, that is to say, the only real level. . . . Or a play about Mr. Saul Bellow himself.

"The Theater is the form, bad writing is the content. It doesn't really matter what one writes about as long as he mixes the media. That is, a TV commercial or a political speech in the context of Theater. Bad writing is what was hinted at by Sontag in 'Camp,' which was a form of jive. Any new movement is a break first of all from the confines of the printed page. One should learn to wipe his ass with authors like Saul Bellow. I do this, because it frees me from the confines of his literary judgment, which is necessary for creation. Upon being free one must then write—as bad as he can!" Well, Uncle Willie! Did you like it?

UNCLE WILLIE: I liked it. Just made me a little sleepy. Why do you write so long, like that!

Robert Brustein

I am interested in the argument you advance but I am not certain you formulate it correctly. Your statement strikes me as rather defensive—an uneasy probe into the criticism being directed toward certain intellectual journals (including your own) which may have grown too infatuated with the fashionable media-oriented high jinks of the sixties. I admit to being one of those in opposition to such tendencies, but I don't recognize myself in your characterization. Indeed, it may well be that the very terms you use to describe the situation are part of the problem, and suggest a continuing misunderstanding of it. For example, it seems likely that words like "radicalism" and "conservatism," "orthodox" and "unorthodox," are no longer appropriate to discussions of modern culture. Originally borrowed from the language of politics and religion, these terms have by now become so freighted with extra-aesthetic meanings as to retain value, in such dialogues as this one, only as a form of invective. They reflect the growing ideological character of criticism in the sixties, a character which developed partly in response to the dwindling options of American politics. This fact was real, and the ideological response was honorably motivated. Still, at the same time that our society was becoming politically closed, it was busting wide open culturally. As a result, it is sentimental to assume that a cultural "radical" can claim quite the same assumptions, frustrations and apocalyptic vocabulary as a radical in politics.

It should now be sufficiently obvious that the avant-garde movement in America no longer exists in its previous form, and that what passes for "unorthodox" or "radical" culture today is often an extension of Madison Avenue—which is to say, of marketing. "There is a marked suspicion," you write, "of any deviation from the accepted notions of seriousness, as there is of any departure from the orthodox version of the mainstream." What mainstream? one is obliged to ask. What orthodoxy? What accepted notions of seriousness? The image you conjure up here of an embattled group of minority artists trying to survive in the face of a philistine public and a reactionary critical establishment is simply unrecognizable in the seventies: it belongs to the twenties. Today, we have a public supine before every cultural novelty, and an army of intellectual critics laboring on behalf of "innovation" side by side with television commentators and the cultural reviewers for the newspapers and mass magazines. In the face of such an alliance, it becomes virtually impossible to identify a "mainstream"; unorthodoxy becomes the new orthodoxy, and fashion the arbiter of taste. What deviations from "accepted notions of seriousness" have been stamped out by hostile "conservative" critics? The Beatles? Camp? Andy Warhol? Abbie Hoffman? Mailer's movies or journalism? Performance groups? Guerrilla theater? Grotowski? Jean-Luc Godard? Minimal art? John Cage? Each is dutifully tintyped in *Newsweek* and *Time*, interviewed on the Dick Cavett and Merv Griffin shows and analyzed in depth by serious critics in the pages of intellectual journals. No, the danger today is not from a "marked suspicion" of the unorthodox, but from too ready an acceptance of it. The emblematic avant-garde figure is no longer the expatriate artist, starving and unrecognized in his Paris garret, but rather

Tom O'Horgan — catapulted, in the wink of an eye, from the lofts of La Mama to the stage of the Biltmore, where he now peddles nudity, hippie sensationalism, street theater and experimental techniques to Broadway audiences at fifteen dollars a ticket, not counting the taxi and baby-sitter.

Given the willingness of virtually everyone, and most especially the mass media, to welcome "new works, new writers, new forms," it is less important for intellectuals to receive the new with the "generosity" you suggest than with discrimination, so as to try to distinguish the truly original from the passing fad. One way to start, perhaps, is to refuse to participate in what remains the authentic American philistinism: antiintellectualism and hatred of the past. I confess I am a little disturbed to find in your statement the inference that those who find value in "old works" are necessarily clinging to "old values" and "old institutions." This seems to me a break with your own traditionally open cultural position. It was of *Partisan Review* that Lionel Trilling once wrote, in "The Function of the Little Magazine," that "it has wished to accommodate the old and the new, the traditional and the experimental, the religious and the positivistic, the hopeful and the despairing," adding that *PR*'s single abiding standard, by which it conferred unity on diversity, was that of "intelligence and imagination." Had our culture not become so hopelessly addled by politics, I don't think we would need to be reminded that there is continuity between advanced new works and what you call "the culture of the past," or that this continuity is one of our few lines of defense against the indignities and barbarisms of our civilization. By what logic does a love of Shakespeare imply an affirmation of "traditional themes" and "conventional structures"? Isn't it possible to appreciate rock music without asking Beethoven to roll over, or pretending that even the finest folk expressions have an equivalence with the depths and complexities of high art?

It is through the confusion of culture with politics that such misconceptions arise, as critics choose sides on behalf of the new or the old in a contemporary version of the battle between ancients and moderns. But the standard of value in a work of art is not the "radical" or "conservative" view of the artist — which is why your concession about Dostoevski and Eliot misses the point. Actually, virtually no great modern writers have expressed, *in their art*, the kind of views you seem to admire, whatever they may have believed as civic men. As Trilling points out, in the same essay, "We see that to these writers . . . Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, Eliot, Yeats, Mann (in his creative work), Kafka, Rilke, Gide . . . the liberal ideology has been at best a matter of indifference." Why this is so has something to do with the metaphysical concerns of the artist, something to do with the nondemocratic nature of great art. But to demand liberal or radical or conservative views of artists is to risk losing not only what they have to offer us, but, ultimately, what we have to offer them, as beings with an existence beyond our "views."

It is true that younger artists sometimes tend to be contemptuous of the past or try to annihilate their predecessors: this comes from an understandable desire to carve a space for themselves. Still, unless we critics are going to function as publicists, we would do well to avoid imitating this partisanship, particularly since the best artists have al-

ways avoided it. On the subject of the new and the old, the unorthodox and the orthodox, it is still Chekhov who speaks most cogently, through the character of his "advanced" writer, Treplev: "I come more and more to realize that it is not a question of new and old forms, but that what matters is that a man should write without thinking of forms at all, write because it springs freely from his soul." This remark, so old-fashioned in its sincerity, breaks strangely on the ears of an age which exalts insincerity, but it rebukes us, nevertheless, with its power and truth.

What I am arguing for, finally, is a truce in the war of the ancients and moderns, and a return to cultural pluralism. One place to start is right in the pages of our intellectual journals. For these journals, as they have ceased to be "little magazines," have grown increasingly narrow and restrictive, attracting along with their larger readerships a certain depressing predictability. Is one in any doubt about how the *New York Review* and *Partisan Review* on the one side, and *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* on the other, would respond on such issues as, say, the youth movement, revisionist history, a book by Angela Davis, the question of pornography and censorship, the essays of George P. Elliot, the education theories of Ivan Illich or the political writings of Noam Chomsky? Each has developed editorial positions on virtually every book, author and topic. If this persists, these journals will freeze into glacial postures, commissioning writers who can be confidently expected to argue the house position through reviews and articles, sacrificing intellectual surprise for the sake of ideological consistency. Inevitably, and as a corollary, the number of articles on culture and art has greatly decreased in proportion to those devoted to polemics and politics. It is this, I believe, that presently constitutes a more serious danger to culture than "political and cultural drifts to the right," since it seems to be common to radical and conservative journals alike. (I should add that this symposium is a hopeful sign to me that such monolithic ice floes may be in the process of breaking up.)

Another way to encourage cultural diversity, paradoxically enough, is to reaffirm high standards, leaving the products of the media freaks and the Madison Avenue cowboys to the commodity culture which spawned them. For if there is still any energy or purpose left in cultural radicalism, it is to be found in the defense of artistic values against the exploiters and profiteers, and the application of the most exacting standards, regardless of the "views" of the writer under consideration. In short, what the culture needs most today is not okay opinions and good hearts, not passionate and indiscriminate publicizing of the new, but rather intelligence and imagination, informed taste and a revival of faith in the idiosyncratic, redeeming power of great art.

Robert Creeley

Some years ago an elder friend was much disturbed by “campus unrest,” although any instance of its literal effects was very unlikely to reach her. It seemed her fears were really the fact of her being increasingly unable, physically, to defend herself or to “get out of the way,” should some “violence” occur in her environment. There must be a large number of people indeed who, biologically one wants to say, find themselves unable to respond to any change of this order and who want it “as it was,” just that that stasis, they feel, secures them in their own increasing limits of possible activity.

I find that attitude deeply human. I remember Pound’s saying somewhere, that “after fifty one can’t keep one’s eye on all the sprouting corn,” that one has to get one’s own work done if it ever is to be got done. Hopefully, one learns something about the possibilities of an art, be it sewing or singing, and having done so, one wants the center of that information and the possibilities of working with it to stay put.

Perhaps even more to the point, art is by nature conservative — which is to say, it pays a strict and constant attention to the materials and modalities wherewith it comes to make a thing. In that sense I remember Charles Olson’s insistence that “we are the last conservatives,” those who were given to care, in John Winthrop’s phrase, about the kind of world we live in.

Politics, sadly, does not seem to care about that world except in small, preferential segments of its existence. The only political group I find myself consistently attracted to is, paradoxically, that of the black community. They would seem to be engaged in both gaining and saving the possibilities of distinct human life. That their actions are often “radical” only emphasizes for me the precise conservatism of their intent. They are not fooling, so to speak, and their action tends to follow the literal pattern of their commitment. The Farm Workers are another, if smaller, instance of the same nature of action.

As a poet I will do anything to secure my own realization of what the possibilities of imagination are. Obviously such a commitment can be at times a destructive and isolating phenomenon. But the *conservatism* of my own nature — that endlessly insistent “save the baby” demand I feel — will not let me act otherwise. I am a literalist. I am confused by what seems to be, yet when actually approached or met with, proves not to be at all. To recognize that another artist is painfully and arbitrarily limited in what he or she feels possible because some group “doesn’t like it” strikes me as outrageous. In that sense I have tended to be far more open to other artists in their work than I have been to their critics, radical or conservative.

Stanley Diamond

In our present age, the twentieth century, cultural conservatism is, in its ambivalent way, gaining momentum. It is the salient mood of both the counterculture and its most principled antagonists, the critical cultural conservatives on the near side of the establishment. It is precisely this split between the two types of conservatism that needs to be understood, if we are to grasp the present dilemma. Some of the best intentioned critics are terrified by that "counterculture" which is a pandemic reaction to our society—both as a life style, and as a rather amorphous set of institutions. The people I refer to are not reactionaries; they are trying to protect the sacred spaces in which they live against the sometimes brutal demystification of the counterculture. Simultaneously, they are busy negotiating their survival in one or another bureaucratic hierarchy—the universities, the communications industry and so on. And their selective strategy for survival clashes with the all-out assault maintained by the counterculture in the name of its survival.

What the critics fear, of course, is that fascism could be catalyzed by provocative countercultural behavior leading to the increasing rigidity and repressiveness of the establishment, in the ambience of which they would, therefore, no longer prosper, even to the modest degree that they do at present. That fear, however, implies a seriously inadequate definition of fascism, for the danger is greater, more immediate and more complex than many political liberals, or, for that matter, radicals, appear to believe. Fascism is more than state capitalism, and much more than opportunistic demagoguery finding its moment. It is the seismic, almost unconscious social movement that occurs when a population regimented in the bureaucracies that define its living space finds distorted affective release, in turn tolerated by the establishment which in the first instance created the need for such expression. The emotions, being captive, become dissociated, and the system in which they function becomes tautological. Fascism is the modern fragmented individual finding a random place in the disciplined mob, prepared to behave under command at one moment and permitted to explode in nihilistic fury the next. The goose step, the time clock, the inhuman precisions of Nazi Germany are the converse of the orgiastic behavior of the Nazi mobs roaming the streets for prey. They were also the converse of the clinically definable habits of the Nazi leadership (the quasi-bohemian aspects of the Nazi movement are well known). One phenomenon reinforced the other—that dialectic and unresolved tension characterizes fascism. In this sense, all modern state structures rooted in the Western experience—including the Soviet Union—all such totalizing structures are chronically fascist, and there is, always and everywhere, the danger of a flare-up of nuclear dimension, obliterating everything.

But the conventional cultural conservative does not realize that just as he negotiates his survival with the establishment, and thus commits political suicide, the countercultural conservative may well do the same thing and for the same apparent reason, namely, to find a

small sacred space in which to act out his alternate life-style. It raises the hackles to note that this potential accommodation between the collective structure and the counterculture was noted by Mayor Daley of Chicago some time ago. In defending the young, he stated that beards were a sign of spirituality, that idealism was a fine thing, that this country couldn't get along without it and so on. He concluded that just so long as they did not attack the police, young people like those who were in Chicago during the convention in 1968 were always welcome back. Similarly, participants in the Woodstock Festival had been praised by local residents, bus companies, newspapers and international corporations for their capacity to act out their alternative life styles without compromising the establishment.

What I am getting at is that the link — shall we call it the My Lai link — between the bureaucratic personality and affective dissociation, the link that leads to murder at great psychic distance, no matter the proximity of the victim, is not fortuitous, but necessary for the ultimate success of the system, although it means the destruction of the potential of the counterculture. Once the articulation between the establishment and its apparent opposite occurs, each is sustained by the flow of energy between them; the circuit accelerates and can be tactically manipulated to keep the system homeostatic. The cultural conservative has a point, then, in his terror of fascism, although his sense of it as a punitive backlash is faulty; and the course of action that he prefers to pursue reinforces the enemy he senses. For he would like to stay where he is, still able to exercise reason, still able to believe, still sensitive to the hierarchy of values which for him defines human nature. But he cannot stay where he is. By conceiving the counterculture as a threat to his living space, to his values, he can hardly avoid contributing to the repressiveness of the establishment, while he avoids reflecting on the consequences of his immediate position.

That is the existential dilemma of the cultural conservative. But if it is his dilemma, it is a dilemma for the rest of us also. His decisions, or lack of them, affect us all. Therefore, one asks of the cultural conservative that he concentrate his fire on the establishment, that he understand the warning against provocation as terrorism, and the acceptance of it a sign of self-defeat. Let him attack and analyze the corporate structure he knows so well and thus help break its potential link with the counterculture which, he should remember, is not confined to communes and campuses, but is also pursued by bank clerks after hours. Above all, what the conventional cultural conservative does not understand is that the counterculture is a deeply conservative movement precisely because it is so radical. It represents a form of neo-primitivism emphasizing the sacredness of life, communal forms of society, the aesthetic dimension of human nature, the continuity with nature at large, and culture as communion. Perhaps the conventional cultural conservative will listen to T. S. Eliot, who, in 1939, anticipated the point that I am making:

It may be observed that the natural life and the supernatural life have a conformity to each other which neither has with the mechanistic life. . . .

We are being made aware that the organization of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly. I need only mention, as an instance now very much before the public eye, the results of "soil-erosion" — the exploitation of the earth, on a vast scale for two generations, for commercial profit: immediate benefits leading to dearth and desert. I would not have it thought that I condemn a society because of its material ruin, for that would be to make its material success a sufficient test of its excellence; I mean only that a wrong attitude towards nature implies somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and that the consequence is an inevitable doom. For a long time we have believed in nothing but the values arising in a mechanized, commercialized, urbanized way of life: it would be as well for us to face the permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet. And without sentimentalizing the life of the savage, we might practise the humility to observe, in some of the societies upon which we look down as primitive or backward, the operation of a social-religious-artistic complex which we should emulate upon a higher plane. We have been accustomed to regard "progress" as always integral; and have yet to learn that it is only by an effort and a discipline, greater than society has yet seen the need of imposing upon itself, that material knowledge and power is gained without loss of spiritual knowledge and power. *The struggle to recover the sense of relation to nature and to God, the recognition that even the most primitive feelings should be part of our heritage, seems to me to be the explanation and justification of the life of D. H. Lawrence, and the excuse for his aberrations.* But we need not only to learn how to look at the world with the eyes of a Mexican Indian — and I hardly think that Lawrence succeeded — and we certainly cannot afford to stop there. We need to know how to see the world as the Christian Fathers saw it; and the purpose of reascending to origins is that we should be able to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation. We need to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope.

Both the cultural and countercultural conservative are searching for sacred spaces in which to live, are trying to recreate culture as communion. If either group, as a consequence of its fear of the other, is captured by the establishment, we will have acute fascism. The only alternative is that they come to terms with each other, against the establishment, and for this they must create a politics.

Morris Dickstein

What we have been witnessing these last two or three years is not a resurgence of conservatism among American intellectuals but something more private and limited — a noisy campaign by a few well-situated editors and critics to reverse the cultural direction of the sixties, a reflex reaction against the real and imagined excesses of the New Left and the “new sensibility.” In short, backlash; and it already seems exhausted, empty, because it had so little of its own to say, and because its few valid targets proved ephemeral or exaggerated.

This waning campaign resembles Agnew’s attempt to create a backlash constituency by manipulating the “social issue,” by playing on middle-class anxiety and *ressentiment* and proclaiming a diversionary *Kulturkampf* in defense of “Western” or American values. There is much that could be said for a true conservatism that would seek to revitalize and reform the most valuable of our existing institutions. Instead, in the name of reason and moderation, we get a shrill apocalypticism that echoes and inflates the “Crazy” radicalism which it attacks but needs. Only the most unthinking booster of youth culture would say, as Robert Brustein did, that “the radical young are questioning the very roots of our civilization,” that our civilization in turn is “tottering” under the assault, and that “there will surely be no future . . . unless the more extreme of our young can cease from annihilating the past.” Only a bad melodramatist, with little historical perspective, could say (as Brustein did apropos of *Dionysus* ’69) that “all this self-expression . . . could spell the end of history, literature, and tradition while banishing craft and inspiration from the arts.”

Even more peculiar than this note of hysteria and crisis is the air of minority dissidence that these intellectuals assume, though their politics sit well within the spectrum of opinion that holds sway in Washington. It’s an odd gadfly that has the attorney general in his corner and the vice president as his (embarrassing) admirer. Indeed, some of these writers and journals only began attacking the New Left in earnest after the 1968 elections: that is, after the Kennedy assassination and the disaster of Chicago, and after the New Left had effectively expired as an organized movement. This suggests an analogy with the way other “dissident” intellectuals ran polemical interference for Joe McCarthy, minimizing his importance, puncturing earlier liberal “illusions” and bolstering the work of those in the universities, the congressional committees and the courts who were eroding our civil liberties.

Fortunately the decline of the movement has not meant the death of radicalism. Beset by factionalism and failure, infiltration and suppression, misguided by frustration into fantasies of violence, the New Left has been dispersed into pockets of social anger that lie dormant but dangerous in every corner of our society, in all the unresolved but no longer invisible issues which cannot be swept away. Torn to pieces like *Dionysus*, the movement is nowhere and everywhere — like the counterculture whose history it parallels, which now reaches out to working-class kids, cops, hard-hats, middle America, etc. For the most

part the discontent is maimed, inarticulate, but ready to flare up on particular issues, as it did during the Cambodian invasion, as it does in countless local situations, from both left and right.

I have reversed the emphasis of the editors' statement and given priority to politics rather than culture, but the two can hardly be separated; both have reflected the same turbulent upsurge of repressed needs and feelings loosed by the sixties. In the arts we have seen an equivalent pattern of breakthrough, followed by retrenchment and consolidation, and a similarly irrelevant backlash, orchestrated by some of the same men. But here the conservative impulse is completely out of place, though exacting standards are not. All great art works, particularly all forms of modernism, are radical and unsettling. Why conserve forms whose best practitioners have turned elsewhere? Did Lukács's forty-year campaign for the realistic novel have any relation to the possibilities—the realities—of contemporary writing? Aren't experimenters equally "conservative" when they lamely adopt established vanguard modes, as they have recently begun to do?

I see the early and middle sixties as a period of exhilarating if unruly creativeness in many of the arts: film, fiction, pop music, poetry, dance, noncommercial theater, even journalism. Lately most of these have lapsed into nerveless imitations of earlier experiments: at best, restless excitement without fresh inspiration; at worst, vulgarization, publicity, pure commerce. An unconstrained, exploratory ambience, a gratifying diversity, still survives, but without mooring or direction and without critical discrimination, for the earlier period unhinged all the stolid certitudes, shook academic standards and left criticism in a state of shock. Never, even in its palmiest middlebrow days, has there been so broad and shallow a receptivity to new invention in the reviewing media. Never has critical cleverness been so widely diffused and so incapable of distinguishing good work from bad. Reviewers hedge their bets, or fall into mindless celebration or exegesis; every new book ushers in a new revolution in consciousness.

Into this breach come men like Rahv, Hilton Kramer, John Simon, applying the acid test, damning everyone, resisting the barbarians in the name of culture, morality, and true-blue modernism, sealed forever in the sacred books (or paintings) of their youth. Whatever else they are doing, they are hardly discriminating good from bad work; they rarely engage new work, except as grist for cultural polemic. Armed with a rigid and tendentious notion of tradition and "great art," they neatly caricature the fierce persona of the high-cult critic of the fifties, but without the self-questioning reflective subtlety that often accompanied it. They dread being caught out or taken in, and are busy proclaiming their own purity of taste, their contempt, learned perhaps from the intransigent, exclusionary works of the modernist masters, for "the general mess of imprecision of feeling,/ Undisciplined squads of emotion."

It's hardly news that the new culture of the sixties, even as it revived the impulse toward experiment, shattered the modernist hierarchies in both art and politics. The ordeal of purification that separated the vanguard artist and his initiate-reader from the words and feelings of the tribe was violated. Good writing dispersed into unlikely

corners and tapped the most unexpected sources. Fiction, painting, poetry, and music went to draw at the well of pop; genres dissolved, merged, cross-fertilized each other; the nation went to war and outdid its writers' most paranoid black-humor fantasies; intellectuals went out into the streets, and into the undisciplined subjectivity of their own heads. Such a transformation is no more likely to be undone than can our new social consciousness be abolished by the break-up of the movement. What we need now is criticism, thinking: a stocktaking of the wrecks and triumphs of the sixties, a sorting of achievements and experiences, a charting of new standards and new courses.

What have the new "conservatives" to offer us at this critical juncture of cultural and personal redefinition? At best a message of caution, an attention to principle, but from some only nostalgia for the fifties, the world before the fall, before our destiny defined itself so clearly in political terms; harsh and bitter words for every attempt to alter the status quo and reshape our institutions to human needs; contempt for the young, fear of blacks, the misanthropic wisdom of books like *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, with its eye scanning the timeless verities and its feet planted in misogyny, disgust, a curse-on-all-your-houses attitude toward contemporary life.

This is not advice that will get us through our present pass. We need to get beyond the sound and fury of *Kulturkampf*, the superficial and misconceived debate between Tradition and the New, to renew our commitment to social change and social decency, to take works of art as they come, not as grist for the mill. What was once experiment is now tradition, perpetually alive and available, still subversive of the same complacencies and inhumanities. Radicals and conservatives alike should stop fostering an end-of-culture hysteria and renew their attention to both contemporary reality and its historical sources and precedents. As Marshall Berman has put it, our traditional values, taken seriously, are far more unsettling than either their defenders or detractors care to acknowledge, while the boldest of our experiments in both art and society can be shown to have deep roots in the rich and still uncharted underlife of the Western tradition.

Thomas R. Edwards

What the editors call "the new cultural conservatism" seems to me an understandable and significant reaction to the events of our recent political and cultural history, though I find its style distasteful and its intentions mistaken. Certainly anyone who thinks, as I do, that the last ten or twelve years have effected a decisive and salutary revolution in America's sense of itself should remember that this revolution was crude, painful, wasteful, even tragic, that a great deal was lost in its accomplishment, that its *practical* benefits are as yet very ambiguous, to say the least. But I'm not as sure as they seem to be that I need the new conservatives to remind me of these ironies. What's

perhaps least endearing about their tone is its assurance that anyone sympathetically interested in what the nonwhite minorities, the young, the war resisters, the radical feminists, the university and public school reformers and the rest have been trying to teach us is a *prima facie* fool, *poseur*, or machiavel, quite without the capacity for hard analytical skepticism the new conservatives themselves so insistently exhibit. I do wish they could stop sounding as if they have a monopoly on honest doubt, as if every new political or cultural event they dislike expresses a single, sinister, monolithic assault on what they alone continue to value.

In this tone, with its implied superiorities, I seem to detect the basis of their anger and fear. Like most of us who've passed a certain age, they had always assumed a cultural politics of permanent antagonism between an intellectual elite and the rest of the populace, a drama in which a liberal or even radical clerisy tells the vulgar laity what to do in the comfortable expectation that they can't or won't obey. Advanced ideas, in politics or the arts, can serve as the identification of a privileged class rather as dress swords and powdered wigs used to do, and like such tokens of status they may chiefly express their own practical inconvenience, their luxurious irrelevance to the necessities of use. They provide modes of competition within the group even while warning outsiders that the game is probably too subtle or expensive for them to try.

People who have themselves already made it in the arts, the academy, the metropolitan intellectual world, and who feel understandable pride in having done so without compromising their devotion to the unpopular values and forms of modernist high culture, shouldn't be blamed too uncharitably for resisting incursions upon their turf by people who seem not to have earned admission as they themselves did. The newcomers are indeed ghastly parodies of what they had in mind, shouting their own slogans yet somehow making them sound crude and blurry, with no evident awareness of how much hard thought and subtle argument went into making them. Worst of all, these rough beasts want to do something, not understanding that populist application is the death of the radical imagination.

Though it may not sound like it, I'm trying to be sympathetic. I don't at all mean to deny that recent activisms have frequently been naïve, muddled, ignorantly self-congratulating. Nor do I mean to impugn anyone's motives when I suggest that the new cultural conservatism looks like a form of backlash, an intellectual mode of what happens when white people find black people showing up on the block or at the plant. That kind of backlash is serious, sincere and, within its own orientation, quite justified; you can't adequately judge it, much less make it go away, by telling those who feel it that they're wrong, because in an important sense they're not wrong at all. But intellectual backlash, if practically much less dangerous, is theoretically more disturbing; it's a failure of historical and moral imagination in precisely the place one most hopes to find it, a closing to new possibilities of minds that have always celebrated intellectual openness and flexibility as the highest human good.

As George Levine impressively argued in the last issue of *PR*, the

past decade has shown us, or should have, that our commitment to traditional culture was in many respects a commitment to the image of ourselves possessing that culture, justifying, in the name of disinterest, analytical detachment, objective judgment, certain unexamined moral and social evasions the terms of that culture may have permitted us without our noticing. To suggest this, contrary to the new conservatism's darkest suspicions, is not to write off traditional culture as irrelevant or dead. Only curators or jealous priests need to take that line. One who believes, as I do, that traditional culture is by no means dead or irrelevant ought to be willing to let it take its chances in the marketplace even if its vendors have to change their pitch a little. It may turn out to look different side by side with the new, but then so may the new.

Allen Ginsberg

ON THE NEW CULTURAL RADICALISM

January 1972: if zaniest apocalyptic Left breakthrough artists Weathermen Crazies Motherfuckers have become integrated into consciousness of the Great Void, it is also noteworthy that by October 1971 the U.S. Middle Class itself heroically objected to the Vietnam war not as impractical but as outright immoral. (Harris Poll, *NY Post*, Nov. 11, 1971, p. 18: "Do you think it is morally right or morally wrong for the U.S. to be fighting in Vietnam?" Morally Right: 21%. Morally Wrong: 65%. Not Sure: 14%.) Thus the supposedly stupid/conservative general public pronounced judgment on its government's war. Historians may find precedent for this public schizophrenia, however recollection of conditions of public consciousness during my own lifetime never hinted the possibility of our America persisting in a war which the general public thought was immoral.

As the public gets hip there is naturally less need for Artaud-like revolutionary theatrics to break through with realization of the ethical monstrosity of the last seventeen years' war in Vietnam. After all, these frenzied theatrics helped succeed in altering public consciousness.

What is not yet known is how the avant-garde — political or literary prophetic — can lead the middle class out from under domination by government forms — robot inertia, heavy metal money, mafia-military dope schemes — that perpetuate the Vietnam war and the greater war on Nature — International Biocide.

Although the middle class proposed that radicals "work within the system" to end war, now that the mass of middle class opposes the war, the middle class itself finds itself powerless to make the government obey its democratic will. The war continues, in substance massive electronic bombing, despite publicly advertised U.S. troop withdrawals.

By middle class above I mean no Marxian category, I mean the general newspaper-TV-minded public. By avant-garde I mean all the

Yippies & Mark Rudds that embarrassed middle-class intellectuals had been insulting & cursing and regretting for years.

But now we are all in same boat.

The war is only the most obvious exhibition of planetary biocide in which we as a nation (consuming half the world's raw material production with only 6% of world population) are involved. How can avant-garde or middle class hope to escape self-created holocaust? Pavements cracked and electric-petrochemical systems broken down?

As the seriousness of the fix settles in on all consciousness, a few squawky politicians and intellectuals who always liked the war anyway will begin claiming the avant-garde went too far (not the government and petrochemical industries and universities) and now's the time for labeling protest in the museum, as if future history were to be a static intellectual museum rather than a strangely psychedelic Ghost Dance.

Asceticism, reduction in living standard, flower power, reversal of conspicuous consumption capitalism's growth mania (always promoted by real estate speculators and usurers as Pound insisted fifty years ago) & exploration of inner territory will be my themes in whatever Salvation Opera we invent together.

Regarding poetics, continued recovery of community ritual modes will be my own effort. What kind of song can a million lonely middle-class pro-peace demonstrators sing on the streets of Miami & San Diego, what American mantra can be chanted in unison, what verse forms suit massive rhythmic behavior to manifest public consciousness to dumb leader Mind?

Clement Greenberg

To the extent that I'm acquainted with the "situation" today I share little of the editors' sense of it. I take it that the situation or "scene" meant is the "serious" one that's represented in *Partisan Review* itself, in *Modern Occasions*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Hudson Review*, *Commentary*, the liberal weeklies, *et al.* (I may be all wrong or half wrong here; in any case I see only two of the magazines I've named regularly.)

I do notice that some people who criticize the New Left also animadvert on what I call "avant-gardism." But I don't necessarily see a real rightward drift here — a drift that goes further to the right than left of center. What I consider a drift to the right really takes you over to the right, beyond the center. (And anyhow the terms "left" and "right" don't belong in discussions of art or culture.) Some other people whose politics sound extremely left likewise attack avant-gardism. The editors refer to such "contradictions" (if those are the ones they mean) as exceptional. In my limited reading I don't register them as that. On the other hand, I would grant that there's hardly anyone I know of who's for far-out art without being for far-out politics too.

If there is any real correspondence between political and cultural drifts it would seem to be confined almost exclusively to drifts to the left.

It's true that a lot of the attacks on avant-gardism come out confused, being made by people who don't see, hear, or read well enough. But they are still on to something. Ever so much know-nothing inanity and middlebrow futility have asserted themselves lately under cover of modernist and avant-garde attitudes — under cover of radical political attitudes too. Very little in all this stuff qualifies as genuinely "exploratory, problematic, and disquieting." The editors put it mildly when they talk of the exploitation of the "idea of the new" and the feeding on the "cult of immediacy"; and I suspect that they, the editors, know somewhere that they're putting it mildly. And if I recognize at all what they mean by the "growing conservatism in discussion of what's happening in the arts," I recognize it as being in some part an overdue reaction to boredom; even if in other parts it does get a few — a very few — swans mixed up with the geese (who happen themselves to be more duck than goose). "New cultural turns" indeed.

And yet, in a different context, yes indeed. Very much of a new cultural turn, a real one, shows itself in the refusal of so many young people to put up with the notorious quality of life — life as it's been from the beginning, and not just under industrialism. This is another reaction against boredom. To someone my age, who's known what the texture of life has been like in too many places in this country, and in several elsewhere, it's like a miracle. For this reason I don't want to complain too much at the spurious avant-garde, or at the freakiness and hippiness that connect with it. In fact, I don't want to complain at all at the latter. It remains nonetheless that the spurious avant-garde is spurious, fraudulent. And if some of those who denounce this impostor confuse it with the real thing, or with a compromised version of what is still held to be the real thing — well, so too do the editors in defending it, or seeming to defend it.

Ihab Hassan

1

An Old Syllogism:

I am avant-garde, well, progressive in any case;
 X refuses to review my books, Y reviews them badly
 and Z never supports my friends' views;
 Ergo: X, Y and Z are villains of the New Cultural
 Conservatism.

A trivial argument. But is it the argument we make anyway? Our intelligence is still rooted in "the human" — brain soil, sun fire, old matter of the heart — which does not seem greatly to change. Is conservatism ever really at bay?

2

Alphabetic Counterstatement:

all, and, change, evolution, imagination, in, is, is, organ, teleological,
the, the

3

To address the New Cultural Conservatism is to ask: do we have some adequate theory of change? None since Marx, I think, and his no longer serves. Freud and some inspired Freudian symbolists, discovering new relations between the visible and invisible, did try. The Existentialists, recovering the metaphysics of spontaneity, also tried. Still, no adequate theory.

Structuralism, Phenomenology, the New Linguistics, develop theories of deep forms, and tend to attract ascetic thinkers, disdainful of change. In their work, we move among crystals, mirrors and crystals. Yet a theory of deep forms may also make the idea of change itself obsolete — Plato's dream. The way out may be down through language and out again. There is a point, perhaps, where physics, biology and semiotics may some day meet. A gamma or galaxy, breath or death, signs dancing in the mind or symbols spinning light, may possess some common ordinance.

Or is there some new theory of change in the dreams of our machines, the myths of our media, the images of our science fantasies? Is there some hint or hope of a theory in the assertion of Buckminster Fuller that man has a special role in the universe? A "revolution of inad-vertencies," Fuller argues, has compelled humanity to realize its anti-entropic function. "This means things are going to move fast"; so ends *Utopia or Oblivion*.

If Fuller does not satisfy our intuitions about all that a theory should comprehend, the critics and curators, the politicians of our culture satisfy us far less.

N.B. A theory of change may begin as prophecy but can never suffice merely as apocalypse. Change is surprise; and Daniel Bell is right: "the function of prediction is not, as often stated, to aid social control, but to widen the spheres of moral choice." Make it also: of imaginative choice.

4

In times such as ours, the vantage point of Criticism cannot be Syllogism or System: Marxism, Freudianism, Existentialism, Structuralism. . . .

The vantage point must be: INVENTION.

The culture of criticism can be, at the same time, lumpish and nasty. How can this be changed? Not simply, not formally, by persuading critics to write poetic fiction rather than prose essays, to choose between "letters." The choice is between the presence of the "spirit" and its absence. But the culture of criticism rewards habit, repetition. We all spend part of our day in a dead letter office.

Where, then, shall we learn invention or generosity?

5

Mark True or False the following propositions, then add up your score. You may interpret it as you wish.

- Most critics who write the lead reviews for, say the *Saturday Review* or *The New York Times Book Review*, have had no original ideas in two decades. Influence without originality is harmful.
- Interesting ideas do not come often from critics anyway; they have come, in recent times, from people as different as Arendt, Barfield, Brown, Cage, Chardin, Chomsky, Fanon, Foucault, Fuller, Goodman, Laing, Lévi-Strauss, Mailer, McLuhan, Marcuse, Mead, von Neumann, Sartre, Skinner, Soleri, Warhol, Wiener. . . .
- The very few critics who do take risks, who do have ideas of their own () rarely speak pleasantly of one another, rarely find occasions for an inclusive public discourse.
- The biggest names in literary criticism “prefer not to,” avoiding (as Herbert Read and Edmund Wilson did not) the discovery of new talent.
- Because most critics labor reactively, they become reactionary, not simply in a political or aesthetic sense, but also in their relation to life, to change. Steady disaffection, without some redeeming dream, produces the alienated intelligence.
- As critics become older, they naturally become more conservative; and the bright young men do not “enter” criticism as they once did when, say, this magazine was new.
- The media of lively expression are no longer the famous literary quarterlies¹ — some now defunct, others gangrenous — but rock, film, song, underground press, social action, all kinds of *performances* (Poirier).
- Wit and Camp aim to please, exposing solemnity and sham. But their inner tensions, too fearful of themselves, are released mainly in favor of the status quo. The new levity is also cousin to self-disgust.
- The grave doubts raised about the Humanities, within the academy and without, account for much of the hostility in the entire humanistic culture. Humanism has become the form of exasperation.
- The literary imagination may be approaching the end of its tether. In American fiction, for instance, the “youngest” talents — Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, Rudolf Wurlitzer, Richard Brautigan, Robert Coover, Ronald Sukenick, Ishmael Reed, Charles Newman, Jerome Charyn, Earl M. Rauch — suggest an end-game in the subversion of “novelistic” meanings.

1 Personally, I have found *academic* periodicals most hospitable to my Paracriticism: *Massachusetts Review*, *Virginia Quarterly*, *Journal of Modern Literature* (Temple), *New Literary History* (Virginia), *Arts in Society* (Wisconsin), *Boundary 2* (SUNY-Binghamton).

6

Of Silence I have perhaps spoken elsewhere too much. But there are others who speak of it also, speak variously and well. Here, for instance, is Octavio Paz:

Art for Duchamp, all the arts, obey the same law: meta-irony is inherent in their very spirit. It is an irony which destroys its own negation and, hence, returns in the affirmative. His mention of Mallarmé is no less fortuitous. Between the *Nude* and *Igitur* there is a disturbing analogy. . . . In both cases there is a rupture and a descent into a zone of silence. There the solitary spirit will be confronted with the absolute and its mask: chance.

And here is Jacques Ehrmann on the new conception of "literature":

Since its only viable status is as subversion, its function can only be a terrorizing one . . . of burning, consuming meaning. By this act, the reading-writing process makes manifest the impossibility of meaning.

Admittedly, the contexts of these statements are more subtle than I can convey. But how can such ideas bring no puzzlement or dismay to the common critical mind, oriented toward the "solidity" of language and art?

. . . dismay, suspicion, anger, reversion.

7

The literary culture

is but a small part

of our culture,

and it will become far smaller

unless it can find a way to enter

or shape

the dreams of man, technics of

his future.

Reaction, however, is not limited to the literary culture. We know that the earth is becoming a single "spaceship." Men, and not only genius, expect every "shock of recognition" to run the whole circle round; the refrain is "all together now." But we also see division everywhere, sects and clans on the rampage, fragments breaking into still smaller fragments. DeGaulle called ours the "age of the nation." He did not go far enough; for we are witnessing the retribalization of a great part of humanity. The phenomenon may be transient, the result of some demented pact between Totalitarianism and Anarchy. Or it may be a stage in the development of the Global Village. McLuhan, now *déclassé* by the literary clerisy, has it right: "As we begin to react in depth to the social life and problems of our global village, we become *reactionaries*. Involvement that goes with our instant technologies transforms the most 'socially conscious' people into *conservatives*" [my italics]. McLuhan predicted this version of "future shock" in the early sixties. Since then we have seen many other effects of Acceleration. Nations wrench themselves from a pre- to a post-industrial society in one generation;

ever greater numbers break through the walls of mean Ananke. The tremors are felt on all the seismographs.

And who owns the seismographs but those who *think* they risk to lose the most?

Caveat:

As more people break through the walls of Ananke, domain of psychic or material deprivation, the nature of militancy in any given cause becomes narrower. Where vengeance once worked with justice, now vengeance must work alone.

The fear of the spiteful revolutionary is like that of the avant-garde artist: success of his cause spells his personal doom.

And the noble utopian? He, too, knows that his dream may serve as the excuse of the past to mutilate the present in the name of the future.

8

(It is becoming more and more complex to be American.)

We are constantly told — and we have eyes of our own to see, ears to hear, noses to smell! — that we are a “dangerous nation.” America serves the cause of reaction around the world at *the same time* that it incarnates the futures of mankind in its midst.

(There is no contradiction here between Noam Chomsky and Jean-François Revel.)

But the American psyche must suffer from this; its largess suffers. The later writings of Norman Mailer show it, pain of the times, great generosity. Such suffering can also go wrong, become nutty, vicious, sick. It can go wrong and smell wrong, yet it is still legitimate suffering.

(Ashes of the American Dream mingle with galactic dust; America is still a possibility we can not expunge.)

The malaise is in the air or in print, scattered through pages of the local newspaper, *Commentary* or *Rabbit Redux*.

The Bottom of American society is rising — blacks, youths, women, poor folks, minorities of every kind — and this should be enough for the Top, by the antiquated physics of Newtonian reactions, to push the Bottom down. But this entire process coincides also with a transvaluation of our values and a redefinition of our powers, our military, moral, economic powers. Can we really wonder, when things are going so strangely for us — going well, some say, and others, going badly, but going anyway — that the American psyche should resort to the ancient defenses of every psyche: violence, rigidity, nostalgia, projection?

(In times of trouble, even scapegoats scurry about to find substitutes and paracletes.)

Yes, we are told that we are the most dangerous nation on earth, and none of us — the reasons differ — likes it a whit.

(Is the New Conservatism at least an alternative to self-hate?)

9

Button-down collars are coming back. Brooks Brothers: “We hadn’t noticed they passed out of fashion.” Fixity.

But the blue whale — may he live — consumes fifty tons of krill

in a day. And the hummingbird, fluttering its wings at sixty wingbeats per second, consumes more than its own weight in an hour. Process of the deep, iridescent action.

10

There was/is a depression/recession. Furthermore, a culture of rising affluence/expectations, suffering from uneven rates of change, must experience disappointment/stress. Sociologists tell us this and much more.

Consider, though, a more speculative notion. In the last decade, American society has been more widely politicized than in any other era since the Depression, perhaps including the Depression. Some see this as a benefit, which no doubt it is *in the short run*. But what if the political consciousness — Right, Left, Center, note the linear terminology — proved inherently limiting? What if, *on the long run*, politics proved an absurd drama, a solemn and destructive branch of 'Pataphysics'? Thus politicians (*i.e.*, everyone) reenact ancient compulsions within a fixed set, a theory of games. Thus they rearrange elements of reality without altering that reality *enough*.

Politics: in the short run, the difference between life and death for this person, here and now.

Politics: on the long run, a tautology of actions.
We can not do without politics; it will not do for us.

Admittedly, the notion is speculative. Yet have we not all seen revolutionaries, young and old, whose imagination is essentially limiting? Caught between the motives of spite and justice, they (*i.e.*, *everyone*) cannot free their actions from the weight of the familiar. Thus we all feel more at home in Orwell's *1984* than in Huxley's *Brave New World* or Skinner's *Walden Two*. We can take political terror so long as it corresponds to our psychodrama, our own terror.

Parapolitics: the science of the implausible, the action of the new.
Imagination takes power. But how? Where? When?

Proudhon: "The fecundity of the unexpected far exceeds the statesman's prudence."

11

Hannah Arendt says: "Progress . . . can no longer serve as the standard by which to evaluate the disastrously rapid change-processes we have let loose." We can, of course, say the same of reaction. But the issue is not the New Conservatism or the Old, the New Radicalism or the Old. The iron plough was feared to poison the earth; and man was never given wings. Goddard was thought a fool, Columbus a charlatan, Galileo a heretic. There were others in memory, a few far greater, and many more politic. Life renews itself as it can.

The issue — I am not sure what it is — comes to me in an image. The image brings a query:

As I write this, in the dead of a Milwaukee winter, I know that it will be read in summer. I sit, looking at a log burn in the fireplace; a hunk of blackness, a trembling caul, orange and blue. I feel the heat of invisible transactions. I think: this is process. And I think again: how make man and process commensurate or same?

Myself, I believe that dumbness to change favors the will to extinction; the energy of life has fled. And though I should like to honor, and sing sometimes, "the towering dead," I should not want to bury them standing straight in my head. Change is musical, and the music is not all of our making. Souls dead to that music, are they dying souls?

Is the issue how to dream ourselves
forward, fall outward, giving to
Time continuous value?

Christopher Lasch

The "Statement on the New Cultural Conservatism" makes no distinction among critics of recent cultural fashions, classifying them all as conservatives and thereby implying that criticism of current culture necessarily represents a purely defensive and "querulous" reaction. In fact, however, this criticism is coming from quite different directions. Some of it is indisputably associated with political conservatism and uses the criticism of culture as a means of discrediting the New Left, on which it blames everything from LSD to the Living Theater. The *PR* statement itself contributes to this kind of confusion by insisting, with whatever qualifications, on a correlation between political and cultural conservatism and therefore, implicitly, between political and cultural radicalism as well. It is precisely this assimilation of cultural to political tendencies that is rejected by a second type of attack on recent cultural trends, which holds that the principal excesses and absurdities of the current cultural scene cannot conveniently be attributed to the New Left. This second type of criticism can hardly be brushed aside as an expression of underlying political conservatism. Is *Modern Occasions* an example of a publication that feels "threatened by radical politics" and accordingly takes refuge in the "culture of the past"? Do these strictures apply also to *The New York Review of Books*, which has printed articles by Robert Brustein, Paul Goodman and other critics of recent culture?

But even the first line of criticism, conservative though it may be in its political implications, raises issues that have to be treated on their merits.

The dominant tendency of our cultural drift is toward the disintegration of distinctions—between form and content, between artist and audience, between high culture and pop, even between madness and reason. The McLuhanites announce that the medium is the message.

The new theater claims to make the spectator a participant and to fuse art and "reality." High culture is attacked on the grounds that it is inherently chilly and remote, overly intellectual and incorrigibly elitist; the champions of popular culture propose to democratize culture by abolishing interiority and interpretation. The vogue of R. D. Laing carries the revolt against reason to its logical limits: schizophrenia becomes the model of liberation.

If art is an interplay between tension and its resolution, the new antiart banishes tension and seeks to dissolve all oppositions in direct, unmediated existence, nonverbal states of being, trance-like euphoria. Performers alternately assault their audiences, whipping up moods of subdued violence, and make "love" to them, in both cases hoping to merge the performance with "life" and to place both art and life safely "beyond interpretation." The audience is offended or, worse, titillated; it enjoys being verbally assaulted; it imagines itself instantaneously released from "bourgeois inhibitions." Relieved of the need to think, to judge, to perform an act of imaginative identification, it is more passive than ever, while its lingering reservations about the new art are silenced by the fear that what is new must be necessarily significant. "Great art is always ahead of its time." Accordingly the new antiart is good business, and its practitioners—rebels all, aliens, outcasts, victims of bourgeois repression—more often than not receive handsome rewards. The public pays to hear itself abused, although there are signs that its enthusiastic enjoyment of the experience may be reaching an end.

The question is: does the new art represent merely the culmination of cultural modernism, as some have claimed—a democratization of the avant-garde? Or does it portend a regression to more primitive levels of awareness? To say that "all the new sensibility has done is to carry the premises of modernism through to their logical conclusions"—the judgment of Daniel Bell—is a little like saying that Nazism represented the logical conclusion of German thought. It is precisely the premises of modernism that are now being widely rejected, although the rhetoric of the avant-garde is often retained since it clothes the artist in an inscrutable authority that he claims to reject but uses in many ways to intimidate his audience and critics.

The modernist movement in the arts, with its relentless experimentation and its dissolution of traditional forms, has carried subjectivity and stylistic complexity to the point of complete unintelligibility, from which the only escape seems to be a studied simplification or cultivated archaism—a return to the religious origins of drama, in music to simple rhythms and melody, in the visual arts to a search for objectivity that begins with paintings of soup cans and easily proceeds to the further assertion that everyday objects, unmediated by artistic intervention, ought themselves to be considered works of "art" (and paid for accordingly, when certified by the artist's signature). The search for meaning, which has produced forms increasingly dense and impenetrable, gives way to a flight from meaning. On the fringes of modern society, large-scale superstitions reappear—witchcraft, occultist movements, fundamentalist sects the undisguised authoritarianism of which offers a glimpse of the fierce desire for order underlying the seemingly anarchic rejection of form and structure.

None of this is meant as a plea for the slavish observance of traditional forms, most of which have clearly reached the point of exhaustion. The enshrinement of the classics in museums and concert-halls on the one hand, together with increasingly esoteric and meaningless experimentation on the other, have brought high culture to a critical point, and the search for clarity, simplicity and directness often springs from the same instinct that has led serious artists periodically to refresh their work in the stream of popular art. There is a great difference, however, between the assimilation of popular themes, in the hope of giving them more lasting form, and the surrender to the utter formlessness of the moment.

Mary McCarthy

DEAR EDITORS:

I am not well placed to comment on the phenomenon you note. There are no signs of it where I am (Paris), and if there were, I think I might rejoice. Here nobody but a philistine or somebody who does not mind being called one admits to any retrograde tastes in art, music, books, films, theater. It is funny that some of the same terms you mention are used: people (such as me) who liked the movie *Ź* or *Divorce Italian Style* were deviating from accepted notions of seriousness. Searching the local scene for outspoken cultural conservatives, I can find only one—Etiemble, defender of the French language against the “franglais,” who still gets an amused respect. On analysis, I think this must be because he is mistaken for a French chauvinist, which is OK in the politics of literature. “*Franglais*” has been making its inroads mainly through the managers and the technocrats (“*le marketing*,” “*le research*”) and through the development of a new kind of consumer chatter: “*le weekend*,” “*le parking*,” “*le magazine*,” “*le standing*” (status). With all these fifth columnists sapping at France, Etiemble’s onslaught on neologisms probably makes him look like the equivalent, in language, of an anti-Common-Marketer, a Yanqui-go-homer, though really he is something much more eccentric—a crank on language pollution.

But no such regressiveness is tolerated, when it comes to music, plays, novels, and so on. If there exists a sneaking cultural conservatism, it is the love that dare not speak its name. This, after all, is a country of fashion, and the fashion-makers are still the intransigents of *Tel Quel* and the splinter groups from it, chiefly Jean Ricardou. Not long ago, at a round table, the *Tel Quel* team announced the decease of the *nouveau roman*, coinciding, naturally, with the birth of a “*nouveau nouveau roman*,” written by the editors and their friends. (Ricardou is thought to be pondering a “*nouveau nouveau nouveau roman*,” but has not yet christened it officially, biding his time or possibly fearing that somebody might laugh during the ceremony.)

The old new novel (roughly Butor, Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon,

Claude Ollier) was relegated to the familiar ash can of history, not only because its authors had aged but because they had been covertly trafficking with meaning. The "new new novel" proclaims its total independence of anything outside pure linguistic structure. It asserts itself as sovereign with respect to what we used to call reality or content as opposed to the container. (Both these terms are now banned from discourse.) Of course it isn't, since language isn't, but that is not my point here. My point is that the "new new novel" is accepted as such not just by a coterie, as would be normal in any country, but by the whole industry of literary journalism, including the equivalents of *Time*, *The New York Times* book section, daily and Sunday, *Book World*, *The Saturday Review*, and not excepting radio interviews and the various congresses, conferences, and juries organized by publishers and cultural middlemen.

The "*nouveau nouveau roman*" is perceived as an event, like the discovery of the double helix (which people were also impressed by without understanding the formulae), and the corollary, that all anterior experiments in fiction are now superseded, is accepted too. The French reading public is *croyant* but not *pratiquant*; they don't have to read the unreadable Philippe Sollers to believe that he has made some undetermined but significant breakthrough.

For more than a decade, unreadability has been taken for granted in the novel—the novel, as discussed in literary panels, not the sum total of novels bought in bulk by the populace. This may explain why the reported demise or the demystification of one of the reigning gods is received with so little stir, almost, it often appears, with relief: "So it's Sollers now. Well, at least no more Robbe-Grillet. Be grateful for small favors." On the other hand, the old new novel will no doubt keep a remnant of its clientele. Habits are hard to shake, and the old new novel, once you got the hang of it, was a Simenon compared with its successor. I can imagine a touching scene in a Parisian bookstore a year or two from now as a middle-aged client approaches a clerk for the latest R.-G., in a plain wrapper, please. "You know," he confides, looking around to make sure they are alone, "I still like a book that tells a story. I loved his last one. Action-packed. What was the name of it? *Project for a Revolution in New York?*"

In my view, the *nouveau roman* (I exclude Nathalie Sarraute, who was never enrolled in the happy band, and the earlier Butor) was largely a hoax on the public and on some of its more innocent practitioners. It was imposed by a mixture of incessant theorizing, astute publicity, and terror. What was achieved, without debate and without parliamentary preliminaries, was a seizure of power. The *nouveau roman* "made history," and history, unlike this or that school of art, cannot be argued with. The few old novelists still in practice, like François Mauriac, were simply brushed aside as irrelevant.

Though sometimes called *l'école du regard*, the *nouveau roman* was never a school (compare the Symbolists or the Parnassians) but something more like an action cell. This is even more true of the *Tel Quel* group. Yet, at the beginning, the *nouveau roman* seems to have been an organic growth arising from individual experiment and discovery,

cross-fertilization, decay of old forms—in short, a natural occurrence such as comes about, simultaneously and spontaneously, in the history of an art without anybody's knowing quite why. Very quickly, however, it transformed itself, perhaps sensing power in the offing, and turned into a weapon wielded by a programmatic group acting in concert, issuing decrees and manifestoes, behaving as a disciplined political unit, recruiting new militants and fellow travelers.

The whole operation may have been modeled on the Surrealist putsch of the pre- and post-war years, led by André Breton, which failed to achieve its revolution but remains a sacred memory, like the Commune. In a sense, the *Tel Quel* group (now Maoist as well as *echt-structuralist*) is closer to the Surrealist tradition of guerrilla warfare. It is more doctrinaire, constantly tightening the inner circle of its adherents, whereas the *nouveau roman*, which it is displacing, resembled a large party machine.

Hence, with *Tel Quel*, the splits to which grouplets are prone. When a new line is laid down, those who do not conform are excluded, and the status of the élite spearhead is measured by the number of living authors (often former friends) whose death sentence is promulgated by the party heralds. This was the spirit but not the public practice of the *nouveau roman* where nobody, so far as I know, was officially read out of the movement. It was a question of passing the word that such-and-such a writer, who had fallen by the wayside, no longer existed.

Behind all this (it is clear) is a rationale of art as history conceived in the Bolshevik style. Since the literary artist must make history, not merely record or mirror it, membership in the vanguard group is essential; power is not seized by isolated individuals but by groups with leaders, a program, a plan of action, and more or less regular purges. Of course you can take your chances of being discovered, like Joyce in France today, by a subsequent vanguard, i.e., by what was formerly called posterity, but the French seem to prefer collective insurance, with immediate benefits.

Of course it's possible that a reaction will set in. Around *Tel Quel*, there is certainly an ominous smell of Thermidor, and I don't know, between Sollers and Ricardou, which is fated to be Danton and which Robespierre, and what first consul may be waiting to pick up the pieces. Yet it is hard to imagine a literary turn to the right without a big political change, and now I mean real politics, not the play *gauchiste* kind of Sollers and his friends nor the literary power-maneuvers of Robbe-Grillet: I mean Brezhnevism with some French Furtseva enforcing socialist realism or else a neo-fascist take-over which might abolish culture all together. Failing such developments, a cultural backlash seems impossible here; the mystique of progress is too strong. A silent majority may well resent the provocations of the avant-garde, but, as I've said, it has no spokesmen.

There was the case of *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture* (1965), in which a traditional watchdog of culture, Professor Raymond Picard, took a nasty bite out of Roland Barthes and the structuralists, the bone of contention being the proper reading of Racine. Picard, I thought, had the better arguments (and this was privately

conceded by many), but he paid the price of ostracism. Moreover, the very rabidness of his attack, in which classic good sense and wit seemed to froth and foam at the mouth, showed how much at bay such a man felt even in the security of his university chair. The voice of reason, which in former days was equated with progress and enlightenment, is now automatically equated with reaction, so that it can no longer even get a hearing. This, not surprisingly, has the effect of rendering it furious, raving; the poor disaffected Temple of Reason is at present a madhouse in which a few dangerous lunatics who keep saying everyone else is crazy are shut up.

Evidently I am one of those. The notion of program in the arts has always seemed to me senseless and nowhere more so than in literature. This is not the place, though, to argue that a false analogy with science has led to awful confusion on the subject — only to point out that, in the visual arts and music at least, it made a certain amount of misleading sense; advances there somewhat akin to those of science have been registered from time to time, although it does not follow that Picasso has rendered Giotto obsolete or that Giotto did likewise for the Byzantine image-makers. (What did happen was that a *painter* who had seen and understood Giotto would find himself incapable of continuing to paint in the "old" way.) In literature, such leaps and bounds have been fewer and farther between, and nobody is enough of an idiot to claim that Edward Albee has made it impossible for him to read Shakespeare any more. More crucial, perhaps, is the fact that music and painting have arrived quite easily at the point of being "about" themselves and nothing else (they were always that to a great extent anyway), but language, unlike paint and sound, cannot slough off its primary function of saying something. When it tries, we simply stop listening. This is why large audiences can be attracted by every sort of non-objective art and "concrete" music but so very few people will consent to turn pages from which no meaning emerges. I do not think this is something that can be remedied by training or habituation. And could it be done, with brigades of adepts being formed in special classes conditioned to a steady intake of arbitrary word combinations, it would mean that the last links with speech would be cut, and man would lose his human characteristics.

If some such process can already be discerned in the sphere of politics and information, then it is not much use probably to try to be a conservationist in the novel, shrunk and diminished as it is. I may want to hold onto meaning, in what I read and what I write myself, but so many forces in the world are working against that. As anybody who writes and publishes is aware, being *misunderstood* has become the almost normal consequence: the average reader cannot read any more. This holds for reviewers too. To give a small, simple example, in my last novel the hero is attacked by a black swan; in one review (favorable), I saw it described as a goose, and in another (semifavorable) as an ostrich. Perhaps it is all the same; everything ought to be interchangeable nowadays. In literature, just as in politics, nobody today can be really a conservative, though some charlatans misappropriate the name. I wish what you say were true and that somebody, somewhere, was cling-

ing to old ideals. The only example I can think of, in literature, is Solzhenitsyn.

None of this, I realize, answers your question. And frankly I don't know what exactly you are alluding to. Who are these dissident and younger talents whose failures are being reveled in? Perhaps the conservative conspiracy has been so effective that I have never heard of them. Among the magazines I get and subscribe to, I don't notice any shifts of position except that *Time*, both in its politics and its literary pages, is quite a lot less conservative than it used to be. *Newsweek*? *The New Republic*? They are about the same as before. *The New York Review of Books*? *Modern Occasions*? *Partisan Review*? *The New Yorker*? For several years it has had some contributors who must be classed as experimental, and it has moved over to the left on Vietnam. I see *Playboy* and *Esquire* occasionally. No change there. *Commentary*, which I borrow when they are attacking me or one of my friends, is more virulent than before, but I attribute that to the personal politics and literary chagrins of its editor.

Are you thinking of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and the warm welcome it got? Well, I agree, yet even here it must have been the ideas, rather than the form, that appealed to people tired of intellectual novelties. The ideas and an underlying vindictiveness. Formally, the book was much farther from the old novel than *Seize the Day* or *Herzog*. You could even say that, for Bellow, it broke ground. In the past he tended to revert to the traditional tale; here he is way over the frontier into pop fantasy and science-and-adventure comics. I can just see some of that dialogue in balloons.

What else? You cannot take a Jack-the-Giant-Killer like Tom Wolfe seriously. And if you must, you will find the same weird dichotomy as in *Mr. Sammler*: "free," "swinging" forms; curmudgeonly notions. Wolfe has taken out a patent on the term radical chic; insofar as there is such a thing, his malice has found a target exactly its size. Otherwise he cannot harm anyone or influence in the slightest the immediate or distant future of new writing, painting, theater, music. As a social mutant, he is more interesting. I group him together with other pod-people like William Buckley, Spiro Agnew, Joe Alsop. The invasion of the body-snatchers. They may be multiplying.

BEST,

MARY MCCARTHY

Richard Poirier

Against the more claustrophobic expressions of cultural conservatism emanating from Bellow, Brustein, Rahv, Kazin, and Podhoretz, there has been very little direct opposition. One reason, I suppose, is that there is so much positively to be interested in, so much outside the conventional boundaries of literature, within which these figures mostly huddle when they talk about culture, that some of the most alert critics have not wanted to bother with arguments, or rather with aspersions pretending to be arguments, that are, besides, tiresomely familiar and retrogressive. The critics I have in mind include, among others, Fiedler and Sontag, Gilman, Tanner, Bersani, and Crews. While all of these have made quite different and exemplary efforts to delineate the new cultural shapes around us, there has been no concerted attempt to show where and how and why the demarcations of cultural life have changed in the past couple of decades, especially those which separate literature, read in a predominantly humanistic tradition, from other modes of expression. And there has been even less effort to show how literary classics might be reinterpreted, and our sense of them reinvigorated, by attention to those elements in writing which are analogous to performances in the other arts.

Because the argument against the more static kind of cultural conservatism has not been pressed, at least polemically, by those most capable of showing alternatives to it, the conservatives have been allowed to appropriate the term "culture" to their own uses. And they have used it quite freely for attacks on everything that does not sustain them in the largeness of their vanities and the circumscription of their interests. Their animus against mass, pop, or trendy culture is exceeded only by their ignorance of nearly all of it and of much in high culture that is not literary and which cannot therefore be explained within the familiar limits of literary controversy and personalities.

Cultural shifts, cultural crises, cultural change on the scale with which these have occurred since World War II cannot be intelligently discussed, however, as if they were matters of opinion merely, as if they depended on the power of opinion or the editorial policy of certain journals. One characteristic of cultural conservatives is the desperate and paranoid need to connect trends only to spokesmen. By doing so they can feel the satisfying illusion of being themselves effectively engaged with the culture and consequential to its direction. Alas, some clue to the unprecedented nature of what is happening is that the conservative contingent I've named can be said to stand for nothing of consequence, and that there is no one who can adequately represent the side of change. For the latter there are those I have named, and some others, like William Phillips, Thomas Edwards and Frank Kermode, who accept their responsibility at least to try to understand, by acts of sympathetic analysis, a few of the many new features in the cultural landscape that seem to call for exploration and offer some promise of reward.

The longing to reduce issues of literary experimentation or youth culture or electronic media or what have you to the dimensions of a debate under the auspices of the old lit-crit assumptions and priorities

is evidence of the nostalgia that grips most cultural conservatives. How else explain the folly of *The New York Times Magazine* running a piece on Norman Podhoretz and Jason Epstein (who properly objected) as if the two represented the lines of cultural force along which we are presumably to align ourselves. Our Bentham and Coleridge! Or how explain the jowl-shaking of Robert Brustein in the same magazine, trying to cast Mailer and Sontag with Eric Segal in a cultural morality play entitled "If An Artist Wants to Be Serious and Respected and Rich, Famous and Popular, He is Suffering from Cultural Schizophrenia." Should Shakespeare have known better? A similar prejudice is advanced monthly by Podhoretz who, while he would be ill-advised to attack an artist for making it financially, now wants to keep literature from making it politically. Just as Brustein would save literary culture from commercialism Podhoretz would save it from politicization. The Prince Hals of the cultural scene.

The desire to endow literature with a cloistered virtue, safe from swingers, fortune seekers and radical subversives, reveals a remarkable innocence about the history of culture and its relation to politics and economic enterprise. And yet in all fairness it must be said that some of the repressed groups whose emergence is so frightening to the conservatives, especially the blacks, display an equally naive aspiration about literary culture. What is one to do with the insistence that there be a black literature or something called women's literature at a time when literary production is no longer either the master key — though a most important one — to the state of culture or the necessary evidence of cultural attainment? We are, in addition, at a point where it is not advisable any longer to speak of literature in national or racist or sexist terms. So that while there is something called black experience and something called female experience (at least for the sake of argument) there is no such thing as black expression or female expression. Literature, indeed language itself, belongs to no one, not even to the person who thinks he is expressing himself, and by now it is a commonplace that no self is ever equivalent to what that self puts into words, whether the self be black or white, female or male.

There is no such thing as black literature but only some literature written by blacks. This is a fact derived from the nature of literature and not from the nature of the races, and it is a point of contention only to those who want still to think of the production of poetry, fiction, and drama as the surest index to cultural achievement. Among those who do think so are not only most cultural conservatives but a good many blacks, with a brilliant exception in LeRoi Jones. Of course the insistence that there must be a black literature gives a weapon to those who are quite happy to use conventional measurements in the assessment of black culture. It allows them to ask, and they repeatedly do: what has been produced by blacks or by the younger generation comparable to the literary work of earlier generations? A respectable enough list could easily be made if to make one did not in itself constitute an acquiescence as to its value. Instead, the legitimacy of any such list and of the original question needs to be challenged. It is not necessary that any group or any period provide us with a major writer as a cultural credential; it is not necessary even to rank the writers who are produced, as in the

idiot habit of designating the "best" of every year. Perhaps there is no "best," perhaps none of them is worth the discrimination, perhaps the imaginative energies in a culture are, for a time, going not into literature at all but into other things.

Since World War II, as never before, there have been abundantly satisfying reasons for the turn of energies into forms other than literary ones. The measuring of culture by standards of literary production makes even less sense now than formerly because the generations since 1945 have had more options, when it comes to modes of expression, and have been less stylistically constrained than any previous generation. Film has been elevated, as was the novel not very long ago, from the category of mass to high culture; electronic media in the form of video and audio tape have brought into articulation areas of life that were before silent or invisible. Partly because of these developments — the most important challenges to the predominance of literary culture since the invention of printing — we are in a period where it is obtuse to ask the same questions about cultural accomplishments that even up to World War II made only some sense. So great is the dispersal now of artistic energies that some of the results simply cannot be seen by those who keep straining their eyes only for novels or poems or plays. But the evidence is there for anyone who will look and listen to it, anyone who dispassionately considers the cultural opportunities provided by hand cameras, portable video tape machines, or the most rudimentary recording devices. What is being produced by these means in an amateur way is often far better than the stories I had to read as a teacher of what is called Creative Writing, and any new film by Truffaut or Godard is more inventive, more intelligent in what it does with its materials, more nuanced, simply worth more of one's time and attention than is any new novel of recent years. As for an evening on or off Broadway, is it, live performances aside, as good as a T.V. series like *The Virginian*? And surely the interviews taped by Robert Coles and Studs Turkel suggest that the powers of imagination and the capacities to shape experience in original and compelling ways are marvelously alive in people who would never dream of writing.

Meanwhile, in all areas of the culture, and by virtue of these same media as well as of increased mobility, each of us has available an unprecedented variety of styles. They have become mixed before anyone chooses to mix them, and this has caused an irreparable break in cultural continuities based on stylistic decorums, on conventions, and the integrity of forms. Necessarily, these developments have resulted in an increased dependence of artistic production on technology and the commercial arrangements necessary to pay for it. You do not expect to produce a film the way you write a poem; you cannot by yourself produce the songs of Bob Dylan even when you are Bob Dylan. In sum, there is necessarily a kind of cultural displacement going on. It waits only on candor and is opposed only by fear. I think it is now incumbent on anyone seriously interested in culture to become a swinger. One could do worse, as a great poet tells us, and after all it is always possible to swing back again to the great classics, the old things, with eyes and ears made not less but more expectant.

John Henry Raleigh

I really do not understand what is meant by "the new cultural conservatism." As far as I can see, there has always been one great, central, even monolithic, cultural tradition in the West. Its roots are in Judaic, Greek and Roman culture, and it was transmitted through historical Europe, having been both "conserved" and revitalized by various European cultures, and subsequently by America and Russia, in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This culture has survived the fall of Rome, the vicissitudes of the Middle Ages, the French Revolution, two World Wars, the Russian Revolution and various other national and international outbreaks, upheavals, new starts, old beginnings, horrors, cataclysms and the like. It is certainly likely to survive the "happenings" of American culture of the last twenty years or so.

Taking a similarly long view of American history itself, one is struck, first, by the extraordinary evolutionary development — successive conquest and assimilation of native space and the riches thereof; irresistible growth; rise to world dominance, in what is a very short period of historical time. A kind of meteor in the history of power relations in the world. (Unlike Rome which labored for centuries to achieve its world-power; unlike China, which seems always just to be *there* in all its enormity and eventuality.) In any event the meteor — one might call the United States the Napoleon of world history — is now beginning to wobble and may perhaps have passed its apogee. One hopes not, but, in any event, act two has begun. How many acts the play will have, and whether one of them will have a Waterloo, no one knows.

But evolutions are never straight lines. In the case of the American rise to power, the seminal booster shots were the Civil War and World War II (World War I was a secondary booster), under the urgency of which enormous technological-industrial-scientific machines were built. At the conclusion of each war the armies were disbanded and the troops sent home, but the economy itself went marching on, creating successively "The Gilded Age," the 1920s and the 1950s and 1960s. But there were differences in what aspects of the national culture were caught up in the three successive "booms." The one of the 1950s and 1960s extended for the first time to education and the arts, and these two activities were subsidized on a scale unprecedented in American history and perhaps in human history. The subsidization of education is easy to document: the G.I. Bill; the subvention of scientific research by the federal government; the enormous growth of the educational system itself. The subsidization of the arts was less grandiose and less apparent, but it was real: the opening of the university to writers and artists; the proliferation of cultural centers on the university campus and elsewhere; the discovery by the entire array of the media, from publishing houses to TV, that the arts were interesting, real *and* profitable. This intrammelmment of education and the arts in the national prosperity and the national sense of destiny and purpose was good in all kinds of ways, if only as a precedent and beginning of a national tradition. Mistakes,

of course, were made: wrong riders rode wrong horses through the wrong fork of the road. However, the extension of the national prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s to encompass these two endeavors—stepchildren of the 1870s and 1880s and the 1920s—was, in the immortal phrase of *1066 and All That*, a “good thing.”

But every gain carries with it certain losses. (I’ll leave aside the losses in education, which are not the subject here.) And in the arts it has been my uneasy feeling that for the past two decades the book publishers, the journals, the movie industry, the university, the museums, art centers, drama centers, have been subsidizing a good deal of meretricious art, verbal, visual or whatever. To deal only with literature: beginning in the 1950s and culminating in the 1960s this elevation of the meretricious reached its zenith. And it reached its zenith because it happened to coincide with three other aspects of American culture which appear to be permanent constituents but are intermittent in their manifestations: the systolic-diastolic movement within the zigzag of the evolutionary pattern. They are: antiintellectualism (or, as it was known historically, “Know-Nothingism”), egalitarianism (or antielitism) and “youthism.” It was this constellation, joined to material prosperity, that engendered the Beats, the Hippies, the whole “Now” movement. The movement was not without its vigor and freshness and it certainly constituted a “culture” in the anthropological sense, but it was not culture in the sense that I employed the word in my opening paragraph. It had its day and has now faded, as is always the case with “pop art.” What has happened in the cold reality of the dawn of the early 1970s is that the “Now” movement has succumbed to that most terrible and implacable and irresistible of enemies: boredom. “Now” is never forever; it is only “Now.” And I cannot see how this perfectly understandable human phenomenon can be graced or decorated with the appellation “The New Cultural Conservatism.”

Now there were, and are, a lot of good individual writers, novelists and poets, around and about. They know who they are. And a lot of fakes too, and they know who they are. But what we are addressing here, I take it, are the general literary manifestations of the past couple of decades. Looking at the general tenor of the literary 1950s and 1960s, I would say that it had the following generic characteristics: it was mindless, “trendy,” antiintellectual, unhistorical, boring and often just plain stupid. Its satire “trended” to be heavy-handed, witless and dull. Its ego-outpourings were self-indulgent and embarrassing to the reader. Its attempts at new forms were both artless and uninteresting. The whole episode was brief, comprehensible, understandable, thin, transitory and ephemeral. Let us consign it to that enormous dustbin or compost heap that is filled with the bric-a-brac and the debris of history. Everybody these days is quoting John Reed in the reverse, so one more instance will not hurt: “We have seen the future and it does not work.”

Harold Rosenberg

The cultural revolution of the past hundred years has petered out. Only conservatives believe that subversion is still being carried on in the arts, and that society is being shaken by it. Today's aesthetic vanguardism is being sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, by state arts councils, by museums, by industrial and banking associations. Foundation grants are made to underground films and magazines, to little review contributors, to happenings and electronic music, to the Merce Cunningham dance group. The art-historical media have become thoroughly blended with the mass media and with commercial design and decoration under the slogan of community art programs. Reciprocally, commercial movies, thrillers, even TV advertising spots have become so daringly experimental in the formal sense as to solicit not the comprehension of a message but the immediate total response of a work of art.

Partisan Review's statement speaks of "a growing conservatism in discussions of what's happening in the arts." Yes, perhaps in the *discussions*, but not in what's *happening*. For instance, the *Sunday Times* arts page is conservative, but that's why it constantly has its foot in its mouth.

Advanced art today is no longer a Cause—it contains no moral imperative. There is no virtue in clinging to principles and standards, no vice in selling or in selling out. Decisions on this score depend entirely on how an individual feels about himself—wretches recycled on the couch can usually be depended on to take the path of unconcealed cheapness. Contemporary culture is in the hands of professionals. Some of the best writers, thinkers, artists make the most money—so do some of the worst—but all deliver the goods.

The cultural professionals serve the rich, and have the radical ambition to be able to tie up the whole "community" in a single aesthetic package for delivery on order. Professionalism is a value in and for itself, and is neutral in regard to values of the mind or the spirit. Publishing is quite pleased to be absorbed into the teaching and entertainment industries. Professional art lovers are less interested in their responses to works of art than in knowing what to tell people about them—an early example: Leo Stein lecturing on Matisse the moment he began to acquire works by him.

Most art collectors today are also art dealers—what better way to prove that you understand a subject than to make money out of it? Money is also the yardstick applied to the art critic—what's happened to the prices of the artists he sponsored? If only it were possible to sell short on the art market! One could make a fortune betting against the judgment of certain tipsters. Curators whose acquisitions wind up in the museum's basement ought to be fired for incompetence. Museums gamble with other people's money, and their judgments ought to be at least as sound as those of a mutual fund.

With the cultural revolution at an end, contemporary creations fall into place as technical ("formal") variations ("advances") on the art of the past. Every work of art exists under the shadow of the historian of its genre. Conservative and radical attitudes count for

nothing as against the weight of data accumulated in support of interpretations that replace the work itself through the hearsay of the media. Who reads a novel or a poem except to collect evidence for or against its author?

Cultural Old Bolshevism hangs on, the manners of defiance are mimicked, there are even efforts to appear atrocious, as by praising crime and boring movies. An assistant professor of English, writing in the *Times Book Review* on a work by the Marquis de Sade, finds his tortures of servant girls tame and is prepared to fit him into middle-class reading lists. Is the professor radical or conservative? His performance is a form of professionalism, a conformist way of making it. In the absence of cultural revolution, the friends and foes of traditional values can at best supply the daily bread of columnists and TV discussion programs.

In art, "conservative" and "radical" ought to be abandoned and attention concentrated on *déjà vu*. The purpose of education is to keep a culture from being drowned in senseless repetitions, each of which claims to offer a new insight. In America, an almost total absence of genuine education in modernist creations and attitudes of the past hundred years is responsible for wave after wave of *déjà vu* novelties. The *déjavunik* exploits his audience's lack of education by appealing to the desire to be advanced and by meeting the public expectation to be repelled by new work. Today, cultural professionals can count on avant-garde *déjà vu* to arouse the enthusiasm of undergraduate movie-makers, post-art aesthetes, far-out curators and collector-dealers for whatever makes the grade as *Time-Newsweek* shock.

Social and/or aesthetic far-outness is a public relations technique aimed at the presumed indignation of a stable middle class that ceased to exist four decades ago. The indignation of the same nonexistent middle class is exploited by social and/or aesthetic conservatism. The only real choice is whether to accept a part in the radical-conservative playacting or to affirm the tradition of critical secession.

There are no objective issues in contemporary culture, and no need to take a position. To champion new works because they are new is as orthodox an approach as to attack them for the same reason. There is the question of the creative individual, but on this question advocacy is absurd. What can one do to help make individuals creative? One might as well be in favor of genius. Besides, who is against creation? From the Pentagon to the rug industry, everyone is enthusiastic about the creative. Hippies are for creation as against everything else. Conservatives who are opposed to hippies see themselves as champions of "real" creation. Clem Greenberg is for "high" art, and denounces Duchamp as a backward influence in comparison with whom John Canaday deserves support.

If creation is an issue, it is one in which only negative behavior is publicly feasible, that is, persistent attack on institutions, ideas and personalities who are obstacles to creation. But society as a whole constantly emits these obstacles. Even what is begun with the best intentions turns out to be detrimental—support of art by banks promotes bank-type art, and so on. So one is opposed to society, one assumes a political stance, for cultural reasons. Yet one is aware that no polit-

ical changes are going to make individuals more creative or less bedevilled by antagonistic forces. The politics of art are a politics of frustration, though no less culturally indispensable on that account.

That there is no radical presence in society seems to give the conservative an edge in the argument. He can revile the mistakes and foolishness (romanticism) of those who still hope for more humane social arrangements and for forms more responsive to actualities, high and low. But though the radical consciousness is stymied, the events of the epoch are radical. The values to which the conservative appeals are inevitably caricatured by those designated to put them into practice. The cultural conservative wins the argument, but, like the political conservative, he repeatedly finds himself betrayed. Hence he is in a constant state of paranoia. The most he can hope for is that nothing will happen—that Nixon will not go to China—and that fewer threats will be uttered.

Andrew Sarris

My reaction to *PR*'s "Statement on the New Cultural Conservatism" is nothing if not complex. As a spokesman for cinema, the only major art form born in the twentieth century, I find myself to the left of the spokesmen for the older arts. As a liberal skeptic on a publication widely identified with its more radical contributors, I find myself to the right of a large part of my readership. As a middle-aged professor, I regard myself (perhaps too pompously and perhaps even too pessimistically) as the inheritor of a cultural tradition in danger of decomposition in the muddled minds of the curiously uncurious young. As a free-lance writer, I see myself (perhaps too romantically) as an anarchic outsider full of disdain for the corrupt cliques of the various editorial establishments. Since my own cultural identity is so beset with paradoxes and incongruities (if not outright contradictions), I cannot find a stable locus from which to survey the allegedly "growing conservatism in discussions of what's happening in the arts. . . ."

There is one sentence in the Statement with which I most profoundly agree: "Conservatism does not always take the same form in culture as in politics, nor is the relation usually predictable." I would go even further: conservatism does not always take the same form in one art form as in another, nor is the relation usually predictable. Also, conservatism in the arts is often not so much a political issue between left and right as it is an informational issue between the specialist in one subject and the commentator on all. For a long time, journalistic rhetoric was all onward and upward. Whenever a mass circulation magazine asked me to do still another article on the so-called avant-garde cinema, the editor would make it clear that a favorable and progressive attitude on my part would be desirable. Indeed, the slightest intimation that I regarded any major portion of the avant-garde cinema

as avant-merde cinema, the mere droppings of dilettantes, would defeat the whole onward-and-upward purpose of the article. There was no political point to the editor's benign attitude toward the avant-garde. He wouldn't have known an avant-garde film if it had uncoiled itself from its container and wrapped itself around him. He was guided merely by the rhetorical reflexes of journalistic optimism. If it was new and even slightly publicized, it must be good.

But what journalism has given, journalism can take away when the wind changes direction in the marketplace. And here I would agree with the major thrust of the *PR* Statement. The wind is changing discernibly, though not so much from left to right as in a mad swirl round and round until all legitimate authority has been uprooted. Intellectuals have finally been forced to confront the massive philistinism of the Left on a Peking stage full of *The Red Detachment of Chinese Women*. How then can American intellectuals ever again write or speak the resounding rhetoric of the Popular Front and the Group Theater and the Artists' Internationale? They simply can't. The dismal drift of history won't let them. When Edmund Wilson declares that the decade with which he now identifies his sensibility is the twenties, he is actually confessing his disenchantment with the supposedly rational processes of history. If he were more sanguine about the seventies, he would probably feel closer to the thirties and forties, decades during which the ideological unity of politics and culture was an article of faith. Of course, many of the famous mainstays of *Partisan Review* were aware even back in the forties that the flowers of art generally flourished in the weeds of bourgeois politics far from the well-tended gardens of the cultural commissars. Since most artists in the bourgeois West would currently qualify in Mao's China as "surplus people," right and left become even more problematical as artistic terms than right and wrong. We are left with marginal distinctions for the swirling American scene, and I should like to mention some of these marginal distinctions tentatively in the form of notes:

1. The art forms of time — music, cinema, theater, dance — tend to resist change more forcibly than do the art forms of space — painting, sculpture, architecture. (Theater and dance of course combine the temporal and spatial functions, but it is usually the temporal component that tends to remain traditional and the spatial component that tends to be innovative.) Why? Simply because man's life is measured temporally in terms of his share of eternity rather than spatially in terms of his share of infinity. One can look at a hundred paintings in the time it takes to listen to a single symphony. Hence, hard-core experimental films become tedious when they last longer than ten minutes, boredom being a function more of time than space. Significantly, boredom has been trumpeted as one of the deliberate strategies of recent art movements. Indeed, if memory serves me correctly, Susan Sontag once published a stimulating essay on boredom in these very pages. The art-show "Happenings" of the sixties were designed to impose temporal boredom on essentially spatial events, and the various multimedia spectacles were at least incidentally exercises in combining time and space. It is perhaps the essence of aesthetic conservatism to bemoan the breakdown of traditional forms and the traditional bar-

riers between forms. Or so it may seem to an aesthetic radical who is unaware of even earlier forms to which his "breakthroughs" are actually returns. The line between the memoir and the novel need not be as rigid as a mere few centuries of critical custom would indicate. Similarly, the oscillations between melody and harmony in music, and between realism and romanticism in the theater, suggest that historical perspective tends to deflate revolutionary rhetoric. However, it might be argued also that the conception of cultural history as cyclical rather than progressive is itself a manifestation of the very conservatism to which the *PR* Statement is addressed. For myself, I would say only that the Theory of Progress is dead, aesthetically as well as ecologically. Nonetheless, I reject boredom as an expression of the disconnected and disorganized fragments of our experience. As a critic, I still hold the artist to the task of creating order out of chaos rather than chaos out of chaos. Hence, I remain classically skeptical of holes in the ground and silences on the stage; that is, until I can tell the stylistic difference between one hole and another, and between one silence and another, again a function of specialization.

2. The *PR* Statement seems to address itself less to art or even to criticism than to the policies of various publications. What did Norman say to Jason and what did Jason say to Norman vis-à-vis *Commentary* and *The New York Review of Books*? (Norman and Jason were both classmates of mine at Columbia, and I don't have the foggiest memory of either one of them, nor they of me, I am sure. The point, I suppose, is that we all leave smaller tracks in the dust of time than we imagine.) Then there is the rupture between *Partisan Review* and *Modern Occasions*, and the changing of the guard at *Harper's*. There is obviously some kind of war going on, but it is extremely difficult to keep track of all the combatants, most of whom are also at war with themselves. Then again the so-called counterculture has so escalated its rhetoric that the most radical sensibility must embrace a conservative aesthetic to retain its sanity. Never before has there been so much guerrilla journalism in our culture, nor so many unauthorized thrusts for power. Consequently, there seem to be too many chiefs and not enough Indians, too many writers (or what Capote would call typists) and not enough readers, too many big mouths and too many deaf ears. In these troubled times, publications and their partisans lose their tempers in public and confess all their dirty secrets. Hence, what seems like a drift to the right is often merely an honest confrontation of the contradictions of bloated, elitist leftism. Also, the Nixon administration is demonstrating that the Intellectual Establishment (and even the entire Northeast Coast) can be completely written off as an influence. What else is there for concerned intellectuals to do then but rediscover their mutuality with the other settlers of the American subcontinent? Hello there, Archie Bunker, and all you sweet, disturbed nigger-hating Wallace voters.

3. As a film historian and working film critic, I find most contemporary articles on film to be reactionary and philistinish not so much because of ideological influences, but rather because of the lack of sympathetic insight and dedicated scholarship. When I read a piece on any subject, and especially on film, I do not ask myself if the writer

is swinging to the right or the left, but rather if he is writing out of a genuine commitment to his subject. Unfortunately, most articles on film are written in a spirit of proud, invincible ignorance and dull spite. The sheer quantification of artistic activity makes it virtually impossible for scholars in one field to pose as scholars in another, and it is about time that film stopped serving as a dumping ground for tourists from other disciplines. For myself, I remain wedded to the notion of narrative cinema, and that is a view that is regarded as very conservative in some quarters and quarterlies. I do not argue this view on the basis of a unified field theory of aesthetics for all the arts, but merely on the single level of cinematic expression, a unique amalgam of the objective (the camera) and the subjective (the mind behind the camera). And in no other art is the lure of pastness so vivid and compelling. No matter. Only the most naive radicalism insists that we forsake the past in order to claim the future. And only the most strident journalism demands immortal masterpieces every season.

Ronald Sukenick

As far as I can see, what we are facing currently is nothing so serious as a new cultural conservatism but rather a media reaction to a culture vogue that no longer seems profitable. This phenomenon has more in common with the recent campaign on behalf of the mid-skirt than it has with any serious critical reconsideration — and, in fact, the latter might not be such a bad development were it to occur. Out here not far from where I live at the moment in Laguna Beach — which Southern California likes to think of as an art colony — there is an art gallery called Clyde Zulch Originals. I would like to think that nowhere but in Orange County could such an institution stay in business indefinitely. Certainly one of the reasons for media disillusion with “cultural radicalism” (if that term means anything, which I doubt) is the cheesiness of the critical ambience that has accompanied recent unconventional art, its inability to distinguish between shlock and originality, between the half-baked and the well-done or even between the raw and the cooked in some barbaric instances. I guess some of it has to do with the recent effervescence of Pop, not that I don’t have considerable respect for men like McLuhan and Warhol. Still, you quickly tire of people telling you that the commercials are better than the shows even if it happens to be true. Why bother so much about gradations of dreck? The same question applies to film criticism. So intellectuals shouldn’t act like movie stars. So who ever thought they should? Do we need the Dean of the Yale Drama School to tell us this? Of course it’s damaging when creative figures confuse themselves with the Maharishi. Of course nothing can be thought out on a talk show,

only cheapened. Of course people should not be permitted to feel that if Norman Mailer seems wrong then William Buckley must be right. Of course when people finally turn against the bogus they also turn against the real thing. Now let's talk about something serious. Since when did we assume that popularity has something to do with artistic validity? If that were true then advertising *would* be the ultimate art form. In fact trendy criticism that operates at about the intellectual level of advertising, or worse, public relations, quickly bankrupts any legitimate trend that may be developing. So what else is new? Is it a revelation that big commercial book reviews are interested in established novelists who sell and not necessarily in new forms that are hard to understand? Why doesn't *The Village Voice* fill the gap, or *The New York Review of Books*? In my opinion the *Sunday Times* is a better literary forum than either of these at present, considering that in justice one can't expect it to act like the vanguard of the culture. As to the vanguard I think of the *Evergreen Review* ad with a photo of Allen Ginsberg that reads "Join the Underground." I empathize with Sontag's European impulse to write at the level of manifestos even considering the element of idea vending that implies. But in a milieu of personal witness criticism which encourages people to make public judgments on things they know nothing about the effect is damaging. A manifesto is okay in a culture that has developed principled tastes, but while a manifesto in Europe might provoke a dialogue, here it can only create a vogue. Besides, our arts — particularly visual — are sick with ideas and especially with the latest ideas. The idea mongering of the gallery scene has been the major culture scandal of the last ten years. We need fine works not fine ideas, and the latter have little connection with the former. The upper part of Madison Avenue has merged with the lower part in the commerce of ideas and I gather that as a result trading in art works has been bearish. What all this points to is not so much a new cultural conservatism as to the culture mart's need for a Better Business Bureau. In the long run it gets hard to sell a debased product. And the irony is that at present — at least in fiction and poetry and, I suspect, in the other arts as well — there is a great deal of good work around, signs of an increase in serious criticism on the Modern tradition and an important new audience that seems about to crystallize.

I'm not going to make another list of the good novelists who have emerged recently because that's not the problem. The problem is that they don't sell — but then neither do commercial novelists any more except for an occasional best seller. The commercial novel is dying at its grass roots and meanwhile the publishing industry seems to lack the patience or the economic freedom to cultivate a new audience. But that isn't a critical reaction and it certainly isn't an artistic reaction. The "experimental novel" isn't experimental anymore. The experiment has been a success and we now have a large, solid, complex alternate tradition for fiction that, far from the suffocating, agoraphobic conception of the novel in the fifties, presents an enormous number of options. I get around the country a lot hopping from college to college, writing program to writing program, traveling, giving readings and so on, and

my experience is that everywhere I go young people are writing out of Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Kafka, Genet, Beckett, in other words out of the Moderns and their successors. I agree that the Modern period is dead, but in the same sense that Symbolism is dead or Surrealism is dead — dead but not dead-end. It is the Moderns now to whom we look back and it is the problems they raised that we have to contend with. Their greatness is precisely in the centrality of their diagnosis and we can't avoid the disease by ignoring it. There is no way to evade them, no way to go back to Tolstoy, much as we may love him, and start over again. It's impossible, no matter how convenient for anybody's ideology, even one's own. Those of us who sense the absence of what Wallace Stevens called "sovereign images" for our reality can't write in the mode of social realism because it is exactly our idea of realness that is in question. Our particular moment and place is located in our heads and our bodies and at the risk of solipsism we must start there and push outward. The moral risks of such a situation are admittedly great and personally I would prefer a Genet with the moral disposition of Wordsworth but you can't have everything. Perhaps if there is a new climate those critics who have felt the necessity of attacking the excesses of the Modern tradition will be able to return to the job of disentangling its successes from its failures and elaborating its accomplishments. Certainly a significant body of work is beginning to accumulate along these lines — in terms of recent publication I think of Ihab Hassan's *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* and Sharon Spencer's *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel*. In any case we haven't such a wealth of first rate works in the Ungröss National Product that we can afford to break up into factions over it. Any kind of programmatic approach is damaging — whether of narrow realism or narrow modernism. In this regard it might not be a bad idea to deemphasize criticism of art in an ideological and political perspective — a perspective which has been the great contribution but also the vice of nonacademic criticism. Of course anything can be seen from a political point of view if you want to look at it that way, but unless at some point art is considered as absolutely distinct from ideology it tends to become indistinguishable from it. It is undeniably illuminating to look at the *Commedia* in political terms but let's not forget that the *Commedia* is already looking at politics in imaginative terms. Any criticism that moves the attention from the work to the ideas behind it is ultimately distracting.

I don't see that the current eddy of "conservatism" goes very deep or that it will have any lasting effect. We now have a mass youth-campus audience that shows signs of developing some kind of literary taste, even if you think it's bad taste. It has progressed in recent years from Kahlil Gibran to Hesse to Vonnegut to Brautigan and lately to Anais Nin in its effort to find some correspondence for and illumination of its own experience. Every attempt should be made to cultivate and deepen, rather than attack, that taste and it seems to me that in this respect the new fiction anthologies that have been appearing, largely for use as texts, and which consist mainly of what might be called the "new" short story, will have a significant impact on the fiction audience

in the next few years. I already notice surprising changes. A few years ago I had to make defensive explanations about why I even put *Finnegans Wake* on the reading list; now students respond to it as if it were mimesis itself.

However, I may be wrong, maybe the novel is really dying. Good, let it die — maybe it needs to. Maybe we are really in for a period of cultural reaction and I am almost tempted to hope that we are. If that were to be the case we might have the chance to gain something very valuable — the development of a new vanguard that might once more serve as a model and an ideal, that would present itself as a vocation rather than a commodity. Hole up, hold on, hold out. It was once not entirely absurd to think that failure, given the terms set by the culture, might be preferable to success. Remember?

Tony Tanner

I realize your statement concerns itself with cultural conservatism, but in England — which is the perspective I am speaking from at the moment — the political and the cultural are inextricably related. I have asked one or two American writers how they feel about the present atmosphere here and in the States, and the feeling seems to be that around five years ago there was a special generosity to novelty in the arts which, in retrospect, one of them likened to a “benevolent tumor.” And it was just at that time that things were opening up politically. Now it would seem that retraction and repression tend to be the norms. One American writer compared this to the blobs you study under a microscope which, when pricked, bunch up into a tight little ball. Such closing up he saw as an anticonsciousness spasm and he felt that, although it is something we have to fight against every day, it is a state of mind — or un-mind — which is unusually prevalent today. Certainly there are signs of such a contraction over here — obscenity trials, the growing popularity of Enoch Powell, a rather shallow nostalgia which manifests itself in the return in dress and often in theater and films to styles and products of the forties, the philistine meanness of imposing charges of admission to museums (the proceeds not to be dedicated to art), the small amount of space given to coverage of new works, a go-ahead young publisher defecting to the underground press and so on.

It does seem in general as though there is currently less interest in new American fiction, for instance. If I may speak from personal experience, I recently published a book covering the work of some twenty-five recent American novelists. I had some good reviews, but I also met with a fair amount of hostility on the grounds that either I had not been harsh enough to them (the “critic as school master” idea which lingers on in England), or that most of them were not even worth con-

sidering at all. Many of the writers I discussed were dismissed as being manifestly ephemeral, obviously trivial, irretrievably minor, not worthy of attention, merely obscene and so on — these included William Burroughs (of course), John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, James Purdy, Richard Brautigan and Norman Mailer. I was not, however, reprimanded for taking seriously the work of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud or John Updike. These are all extremely good writers in their ways. But Bellow's later work has sounded increasingly conservative, while Updike's fiction can be seen as finally endorsing suburban values. So from that point of view I did encounter a good deal of discomfort with the new, an instinct to reject the unknown rather than try opening up to permit the possibility of some alteration and enrichment of consciousness and extension of imaginative experience. But then England has long been renowned for its insularity, sometimes confused with tradition, and in a basically conservative country a suspicion of the new, the experimental, is quite customary. I think it would be true to say that most people still prefer works which endorse, rather than challenge, their accustomed modes of perception. The inclination to "make it new" is much more endemic to America than England where, if anything, a directly contrary impulse is the norm. However, one can overstress the degree of cultural conservatism and repression — films, novels, poetry, music which would have had no audience, or any chance of publication, ten years ago, are still coming out. Perhaps an extremely avant-garde artist might say that these apparently new works simply represent the current establishment — just as, for instance, one American writer I spoke to regarded *Partisan Review* as conservative. It all depends on where you are standing.

But I am not sure we are talking about authentic conservatism so much as another assertion on the part of the bourgeoisie of its timidity, philistinism and power for inertia. True conservatism can be a dignified and justified attitude. Thus Burke, perhaps a little complacently, but with a flexible toughness of mind we can still admire: "I think our happy situation owing to the constitution. . . . owing in a great measure to what we have left standing in our several reviews and reformatations, as well as to what we have altered or superadded. Our people will find employment enough for a truly patriotic, free and independent spirit, in guarding what they possess from violation. I would not exclude alteration neither; but when I changed, it would be to preserve. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building. A politic caution, a guarded circumspection, a moral rather than a complexional timidity, were among the ruling principles of our forefathers in their most decided conduct. . . . "Let us add, if we please, but let us preserve what they have left." When Reagan is preparing to sell off the redwood trees for lumber, he says "If you've seen one redwood you've seen them all." There is nothing truly conservative about Reagan; and to apply the word to Spiro Agnew, who is merely a noise and a temperament, is to debase the term intolerably. Of course, many of us feel that the need for new architecture is as important, if not more important, than

endlessly maintaining the shape of the original building — whether the building be the state, art, education, law or consciousness itself. No one, I hope, wants to knock down Chartres. But as John Barth says, you can't build it again — it would emerge as parody. So obviously the ideal thing is to conserve Chartres, but appreciate and accommodate that drive to build new forms which is vital to the health of a society. And today, I agree, it seems as though that drive is running into quite a bit of trouble, though, as always, things look, and probably are, more drastic in America than over here. As I heard an American writer suddenly exclaim at a party — "You don't understand; we're really up against the wall over there." I don't think any English artist could say that with the same credibility.

COMMUNICATIONS

TOWARD A NEW NEW LEFT

The movement of the sixties rose from an unprecedented social base, the emerging stratum of educated labor created by the expansion of postwar American capitalism and its acute need for skilled technical and managerial workers. Previous radical student movements had been tiny eruptions of marginal intellectuals—ours was the first to embody the disaffection of a socially and economically central sector of the population. There were more students in Washington in May 1971 than there were in nineteenth-century Russia.

Because the base of the sixties movement was socially significant, because the movement had a consciousness of its own oppression and at least implicitly a sense of its own needs, it could sometimes (through student power, street confrontations, youth enclaves) try to stand on its own, and, in the absence of radical movement elsewhere in the society, even to claim that it was the embryo of revolutionary agency itself (“we are the people”) — a movement *for itself*. In other moments (community and factory organizing), it tried to deny its social reality by claiming to be the instrument, or the vanguard, or the catalyst, of social forces which were *really* oppressed (the poor, blacks, industrial workers, the third world), and capable of taking power — a movement *for others*. Throughout the sixties the movement oscillated, searching more for identity than for strategy, unable to take the strategic debate seriously or to devise post-student organization because it was preoccupied with identity and because in its isolation from the rest of American society it felt compelled to take on every political responsibility at once. And as the for-itself mood (climaxing in Chicago, August 1968) proved incapable of making change the movement became uneasy with its vision and the privilege of its social base; as the war accelerated the pressure on for-itself identity became fiercer; finally, in the name of Marxism,

or loyalty to the world proletariat (and specifically to Vietnam), the movement proceeded to drown its novelty and to deny its right to exist for itself. In the process, of course, it became rather useless to others, since it could do little for others unless it were first organized for itself. Unable to carry the burden of historic novelty, sects within SDS (Progressive Labor, Weatherman, Revolutionary Youth Movement) took on pseudo-identities as self-appointed vanguards and fifth columns of other forces, thus holding onto their elitist belief in their right to rule while claiming to have entered the revolutionary lists in the name of their chosen constituencies. They split and devoured SDS so easily because they capitalized on a widespread self-doubt; with a rush they occupied a vacuum of identity and strategy, virtually without opposition. Identity politics swallowed itself. The alternative, a conscious programmatic radicalism, has not yet formed.

If one were to look to an organized movement, its structural features are easier to visualize than the social prerequisites. Such a movement would federate the local broad-based insurgent groups now engaged in struggles to achieve power in communities, cities, and a few states, with the functional career groups active within workplaces and specific institutions. Some of the functions of such a federation would be:

(1) To devise a decentralized socialist program which expresses a common understanding of the needs of the American people without masking the inevitable tensions among federated groups—a program which insists on the principle of workers' control and contests corporate power over war, environment, resources, health, and so on; a program which is both practical and visionary;

(2) To coordinate political work among those already in motion;

(3) To help disparate and sometimes opposed local groups discover a common interest;

(4) To choose priorities for new organizing ventures, so that a student or dangling radical may know where he is needed;

(5) To train catalytic organizers;

(6) To develop fruitful debates over theory; to provide distribution for reports on the testing of theory by practice, as well as alternative media to convey program to unorganized people;

(7) To experiment with modes of leadership that minimize elitism. What I have in mind is obviously not a Leninist party, not a shadow government, but a well-articulated network of relationships among local and functional groups which works to bolster those groups and takes on only certain well-defined and limited, though important, tasks in addition. It would not itself prepare to take power, but rather to reach

and activate a mass movement and develop an infrastructure of organization (“a new society within the shell of the old”) for which the idea of power would be conceivable. It would not be afraid to fight for reforms — what André Gorz in *Strategy for Labor* (Beacon) has called “nonreformist reforms,” the campaign for which would illuminate the necessity and possibility of democratic power. Such a provisional “organization” — though it would not be as rigid as that word has come to imply — as more than the creature of a handful of intellectuals, say, or a particular sect, is possible only if some critical mass of local and functional groups exists first, because only roots in such groups would legitimize it. So far there exist only a handful of constituent groups, mainly black workers’ caucuses, professional networks and youth enclave associations.

This fact points to the central obstacle to a gathering of radical forces — the class isolation of the existing white movement. The activists of the sixties and again of the early seventies come primarily from the upper social strata and have proved largely incapable of spreading effective and workable radical consciousness to industrial workers, the white poor, secretaries, tellers, clerks, housewives, computer programmers, teachers . . . police. (The single important exception is the GI movement, which has benefited from ex-student organizers, at least up to a point.) Almost every movement project that has promised systematic outreach — Mississippi Summer, SDS community organizing projects,¹ Vietnam Summer, work-ins, People’s Peace Treaty, etc. — has foundered on the rock of the organizers’ programless insularity. Driven by a combination of moral fervor and guilt, unable to satisfactorily explain their presence in alien cultures, organizers have responded to the suspicion and inertia of the chosen constituency by lapsing into elitist behavior, which in turn heightens the “apathy” of the unorganized. It is not so much that the organizers have not known what to propose, but that they have not known much about their constituency’s culture and needs, not known how to listen, observe, and translate observation into program and tactic.

But what is significant is that organizing by outsiders who are not exquisitely careful is almost inescapably elitist and probably ineffective

1 Of all these projects of the sixties and early seventies, there is substantive written analysis only of community organizing. See Ronald Glick, “Southern Community and New Left Organizers,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California School of Criminology (Berkeley, 1969); Todd Gitlin and Nanci Hollander, *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Paul Potter, *A Name for Ourselves* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

even in its own terms *if the constituency has not begun to mobilize itself*. For this reason, *cross-class* national organization awaits the self-mobilization of the unorganized — coherent organization arising from rank-and-file trade union revolts (especially over control of the work process), white-collar and lower-professional insurgencies, deep-rooted community organization, especially in the ghettos. There are beginnings in all these areas, especially among black workers, but they are only beginnings. As these stirrings are heard, the ex-student activists may help — with a variety of specific skills as well as with a political program which clearly shows the interdependence of the sectors. But without workers' self-mobilization, the plant-gate leaflet that "explains the worker's immediate grievances in a larger perspective" is just another piece of paper. The much-touted "worker-student alliance" awaits the revolt of the workers, which student and ex-student activists can herald but not really hasten.² To be sure, movement antiauthoritarianism and radical politics have spread among the lower-class young, penetrating junior colleges, high schools, and the Army, which among them will graduate many of the next generation of young workers — but the movement has not done much directly to help fix antiauthoritarian attitudes into clear political understanding and program. Should these attitudes crystallize on the job, as seems at least possible, the working classes and the ex-student activists might end up that much closer together. But even in this eventuality there would remain enormous difficulties in achieving a common program which takes account of the young activists' post-scarcity vision without merely consolidating their class privilege. And that racial and sexual suspicions would overshadow even those of class goes without saying. Relations between the socialist federation and black and feminist movements would have to be worked out with a sensitivity born of great finesse as well as need.

Still other obstacles loom before the prospect of an organized radical movement. The aging ex-student activists have a long way to go to overcome the comfortable and (to the active) rewarding elitism and male chauvinism. Self-admonition and *mea culpa* have become routine — and largely empty. What is required is more than observation of the

2 To be sure, there have been many lost opportunities. For example, if the mass student movement that crested in 1968–69 had seriously attempted to carve out some power within the universities beyond black studies programs, "liberated zones" of a sort, they could have been used to teach labor history, theory of capitalism, etc., to train organizers, to invite workers onto the campus, etc. The chance will not come again until mass student organization re-emerges. In the meantime, sporadic support for strikes, while sometimes useful, rarely cements lasting political relationships.

crimes, but an understanding of their deep roots in our socialized psyches: finally, each activist must become aware of his *own* victimization in the social system, and make that the primary ground of his political being. Conscious of his own stake in revolutionary change, and his own socially-bred limitations, he is less likely to trample on the rights of the others he stoops, altruistically, to organize. But so much of the movement's arrogance is embedded in its social origins, in the institutions of its nurturance, and, most poignantly, in the need to do something for Vietnam. That arrogance will not be easy to uproot.

Nor will the impatience — implanted by childhoods of immediate gratification and nurtured by television's propensity for instant solutions, and finally heightened by the sense of urgency to end the war, leading activists to seek quick-frozen Marxist-Leninist ideology and apocalyptic symbolic violence, and ending in demoralization, crack-up and terrorism when change is not forthcoming. Nor the activists' contempt for the Americans locked into their consumptive traps. Nor the attitude that a revolution is property, the exclusive possession of the faction with the reddest book or the most extravagant rhetoric. Nor the substitution of chants for concrete analysis, or sentiment for theory, guns and self-sacrifice for strategy, or "vanguard" for mass.

Optimists call this moment a transitional period. Many young activists are confused and deeply troubled, trying to take stock of failures and deep dilemmas built into the history of the past decade, trying to find strength to keep working under severe pressure without clear guidelines. Does the movement exist? The intuitive answer shifts from day to day. How do I find the movement in any given city? Style of dress and hair tells me nothing. Perhaps I am directed to the youth ghetto, the campus, a certain office, a certain collective, but I find they have little in common and not much of a credible idea of what I should do. The movement is everywhere; it exists perhaps as a disembodied Idea, a historical ghost come too early or too late; and as Tom Nairn has pointed out in his book (with Angelo Quattrocchi) about the French events of May 1968 (unfortunately unavailable in this country), *The Beginning of the End* (London: Panther, 1968), sectarianism emerges as combat for possession of a revolution which is only an Idea. If the movement exists it exists despite itself, because so many people need to believe in it — a curious and fragile form of existence indeed.

In any case, the *organized* radical movement of the sixties is wrecked and obsolete, a victim of its own spirited innocence, its driven quest for identity substituting for conscious politics, its acceptance of

too heavy a historical burden. With the advantage of hindsight it is always easy to notice inevitability, yet in this instance a good case for inevitability can be made. Not only was the movement's social base — educated labor — a new phenomenon, giving rise to surprise and confusion that the movement should exist at all, but the movement was in many ways marginal to potential power and desperate to compensate for marginality with political hubris. It had all the intellectual pathologies and, because of its ambitions, few of the advantages.

But also a large part of the trouble was that, in a sense, the movement was forced to give birth to itself. Throughout the sixties, the Marxist-Leninist remnants offered analyses of imperialism, but were largely discredited by Stalinism; the social democrats offered a verbal insistence on democracy, until the Mississippi blacks pleaded for it in 1964; the honorable pacifists offered at least an insistence on direct action; but none of them offered any clear understanding of the structure and texture and flow of contemporary American society, and none of them stood for a live movement. So the movement was forced to patch together a worldview with scraps of leftover theory and intuition, sewed together with moralism and a faith in youth and our own experience. Youth was overvalued because there were few elders to emulate, and moralism had to substitute for ideas left unrepresented by credible advocates, or even unavailable. This fragile patchwork was left virtually alone to combat the most powerful and arrogant empire in the history of the world. No wonder the seams could not hold. It is remarkable that the movement survived as long as it did, spread as many waves, met as many responsibilities, engendered as much fresh analysis, expressed as much energy.

The movement choked on its own myths, but myths like cowards die many times and still clutch life. Some radicals heralded the counter-culture as a here-and-now embodiment of liberation; but the myth of the Age of Aquarius went down in anomie and blood at Altamont, in the bodies of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, in smack and speed, in John Lennon's "the dream is over." Some held to the myth of the movement itself as the new society aborning; that myth died again and again and finally in the SDS debacle. Some believed in salvation in following the most oppressed and therefore presumably more clear-sighted blacks; that myth fell with the fratricide in the Black Panther Party. And some believed that the revolutionary climax was imminent, a kind of projection of the internal clock which for years has been stuck at a minute to midnight; that myth died in a Greenwich Village townhouse. Each myth displaced clarity and each persists. Yet a movement of the

seventies and eighties could begin with considerable advantages. There are ten years of proximate experience to be explored, codified, and made generally accessible. There is something of a new political culture which offers some—not nearly enough—practical models of radical work, and some protection. There is some awareness of the evils of male dominance, self-righteousness, encapsulation (“Berkeley is America”). And with the patent failure of the political system and the decay of prevailing ideology, radical ideas are coming to have a legitimacy in many layers of the society which could encourage imagination and energy.

There are scattered signs of new possibilities. If there is much despair and self-delusion among radicals there is also something of a new realism, bubbling beneath the public surface of self-celebratory underground media and extravagant rhetoric. There is not only a modest upwelling of analysis and self-criticism on the Left, mostly in *Liberation* and in privately circulated papers, but more important, the unavoidable insistence of the women’s movement that a revolutionary movement cannot be allowed to replicate the pathologies of the larger society. Yet finally myths persist past their time when they are not supplanted by more plausible ideas. At the moment, there is no sign of strategy or actionable political program generally agreed upon. The new awareness inhabits a political vacuum.

The question is not whether there will be a revolutionary 1984 but whether there will be a credible mass revolutionary movement, strategically located in production, bent on democracy, capable of taking and remaking power. If an unprecedented revolution is not just felt to be necessary for The Others, but for oneself, if it is understood as a process in which a revolutionary integrates his life, love, and work, without contempt for others who do not, then the powerful and joyful and sustaining sense of a movement’s self may re-emerge—this time not as an exclusive identity, defined by moral superiority to The Others, nor as a Judeo-Christian gift to The Others, but as an I-Thou confluence which defines itself more by inclusion than by exclusion, which makes it natural if not easy for The Others to feel themselves, and be, a part of the process of conscious change. A new movement could be the long-overdue and historically appropriate marriage between socialism and anarchism, expressing a practical vision of decentral power which banishes once and for all the powerful ghost of Stalin. It could span an age continuum which gives the young models of useful roles. Such a movement could make “revolution” more than a rallying cry or a statement of urgent and inchoate need, but a plausible image of the

future anchored in concrete program and the feeling-tone and organization of the movement itself. Or by 1984 the We might have disintegrated, partly absorbed and partly repressed, into a vague allegiance barely concealing a congeries of mutually suspicious and politically marginal clusters, sealed in obsolete ideology, making some concrete changes but unable to use victories to achieve momentum for more, hopping from project to project without truly absorbing the lessons of any, pugnacious, anomic, more acted upon than acting — swimming in the sea of radical consciousness but not swimming anywhere in particular.

There is plenty of historical precedent for both futures, and both tendencies are alive. Which one is to prevail depends in part on the opening of the political system, the possibility of real changes which a movement causes and then transcends, the pace and extensiveness of radicalization throughout the society, and on political-economic factors so chancy that speculation seems pointless. But more pointedly the future of the young activists hangs, as always, on choices, on irreducible will. Can the volcanic women's movement face inward ("consciousness-raising") and outward (program and organizing, especially among working women) at the same time? Will there be a new and wiser wave of radical student organization? Will the youth enclaves become bases for forays into the rest of America, rather than enclosed voluntary reservations, internal exile colonies, for freaks, radicals, and utopian experimenters? Will radicalism in the workplace and community come to overshadow the radicalism that thrives parasitically on capitalist fat? Will radical professionals maintain momentum? No one knows. But even today's young radicals would have great political weight if they could reconcile leadership with democracy and organization with initiative from the bottom, if they could get out from under media definitions of radicalism, if they could take seriously the need for new theory, vision. One tires of ifs. Despite the present stalemate, more than any other American Left of the last fifty years the young activists have a chance to free themselves of mystification, and to be "new" not just chronologically but in ideology, style, and consequence. So much of the chance for change and hope and a decent life hangs in the balance that it seems absurd to count the consequences.

Todd Gitlin

FIRST REVIEWS

EDITORS' NOTE: First Reviews is a new department in PR. It will be devoted exclusively to short reviews of first novels, first collections of short stories, and first books of poetry—from commercial publishers, university presses, and small presses—which we think are too often neglected.

GOING PLACES

WOLF. By Jim Harrison. Simon and Schuster. \$5.95.

GOING NOWHERE. By Alvin Greenberg. Simon and Schuster. \$4.95.

THE JANE CASTLE MANUSCRIPT. By Philip Greene. Delacorte Press. \$5.95.

The “false memoir” of Jim Harrison, *Wolf*, is a young man’s novel which never loses its youthful delight with its own processes, the total recall of memories of Home, New York, Boston and The West. The hero, Swanson, is lost in the uninhabited Huron Mountains, and passages dealing with his predicament are alternated with passages of memory. He is lost in the wilderness, and, we assume, he has always been lost; his life is as shapeless as nature itself.

Swanson is not very wolflike, thankfully. He drinks a great deal and wears himself out, but he is at least unpretentious, likeable, with no fashionable craving for violence or irrevocable acts. At the age of thirty-three he attempts to weigh his “mental scar tissue” and to assess himself. He is susceptible to bouts of madness in the late winter but he is essentially a wholesome—one might almost say a collective—personality, a normal young man who has somehow behaved in a number of curious and abnormal ways. *Wolf* is a small-scale, Americanized, pop *Remembrance of Things Past*, another tender chronicle of the road and the city, the unfocused young man with infinite adventures and no way

of comprehending them. Its recollected details pile up without much emphasis or dramatic organization; the novel might have been cut back neatly to one half its length, made more intense, more compelling. Swanson emerges as an American youth in search of some event which will ritualize his strange formlessness, a youth even at the age of thirty-three, for he can locate no initiatory force that will change him, apart from the impersonal rigors of nature. *Wolf* is a novel of initiation that comes to no end, and it is, itself, an initiation, the kind of diarylike work many writers must publish before they can write their first significant books.

Going Nowhere, like a song called "Goin' Nowhere," is a "very curious melody" because there is "no way of telling what note to expect next." Well, yes. Alvin Greenberg's first novel is an extended tall tale about a young man who, through a complicated accident, loses his left leg just below the knee and takes to the road, and is some years later involved in an attempt by a group of scientists to make the world aware of the Principles of Unteleology (a kind of pre-Socratic existentialism). Greenberg's style is sprightly, unpretentious, uncynical, like that of a better-natured Kurt Vonnegut. Indeed, *Going Nowhere* is as intelligent and provocative as anything Vonnegut has written. It is unfortunate, given the times, that the dust jacket should claim for its young author the invention of "green humor" which, unlike that notorious black humor, "remains within the confines of good taste."

Witty, urbane, unserious and extremely skillful in his short fiction, Philip Greene has written a first novel that I find perplexing. Most of it is the "confession" of a thirty-six-year-old woman named Jane Castle, whose mind is, as the author admits, rather thinly furnished. The book consists of Jane Castle's "manuscript," and "tapes and notes on tapes." The reader may glance through certain representative remarks and come to his own conclusions —

Prologue: "I want to know, when do I get mine."

Chapter 1: "I have spent my life hoping to be loved, thinking that sex was the door to love."

"... He left and I surveyed the scene of the debauch."

Chapter 2: "He took out his wallet and put a ten-dollar bill on my night table."

"... I snapped a tissue from the box next to the bill. 'Ten dollars for cruelty to animals. Right?'"

'That's the baby. We had laughs. Right?'"

'Lots of laughs.'"

Chapter 3: "I'm always trying to prove I'm a woman. No one has accepted that proof. Marriage is the proof of womanhood. That's our society. . . ."

"I could have married Bobby Green years ago. I could have structured a relationship that would have ended in marriage. I could have had a decent marriage with Larry Farber. We wouldn't have had a bad marriage."

"I know I have it with David Astor, if he gives it half a chance. I love David Astor."

Chapter 4: "She was giving me a good look at top of stocking and panty girdle. What would my next step be if I was a man?"

(Part II)

Chapter 3: "There I was with \$25 worth of goods and a million dollars worth of trouble."

Chapter 4: "This is what happens. You lean out to your man, ready to greet him at the end of a day, your feelings all mobilized, and sliding down your spine like a jellied snake comes the rebuff."

". . . Animal whimpers from me encourage him."

(Part III)

Chapter 1: "Wasn't it time to stop playing career girl and seriously apply myself to the business of finding a man?"

Chapter 2: "He began with his tools. An abortion is not a comfortable feeling."

Excerpts from the tapes: "I could tell you this whole story in song lyrics."

Joyce Carol Oates

WEAPONS AND WORDS

OBSCENITIES. By Michael Casey. Yale. \$5.00; paper \$1.75.

SAIGON CEMETERY. By D. C. Berry. University of Georgia. \$4.00.

TREASURY HOLIDAY. By William Harmon. Wesleyan. \$4.75; paper \$2.45.

NUCLEAR LOVE. By Eugene Wildman. Swallow. \$5.00.

First, two Vietnam books. Neither, thank Apollo, is self-righteous. Probably many of you feel, like me, that if you read one more pious "protest" poem you will puke.

Michael Casey's *Obscenities*, this year's Yale Younger Poets prize-winner, is like a *Spoon River Anthology* of Nam, or Willie and Joe modernized. Casey does it, as Sylvia Plath says, so it feels real. You follow him and his fellow grunts from conscription to discharge. They

talk (Casey is obviously in love with talk) beautiful American languages — in boot camp:

*When the Command Sergeant Major
Asks ya somethin
Don't get nervous or scairt . . .
Look tall
Whip it to me, Command Sergeant Major
Ah know ma shit
Whip it to me*

or caught off limits:

*An all these PFs
Around the one scared soul brother
Just tryin to get a piece a pussy mann
Why's everyone so cold mannn*

or in other predicaments:

*I couldn't tell
But then I grabbed
Down there
It's a woman or was
It's all right
I didn't mind
I had gloves on then*

Anecdotes about skivvy girls and practical jokes on captains are equal here with tales of brutality and betrayal of some Vietnamese (all the dinks who appear in this book are nominally “allies”), as well as friendship, good working relations and kindness toward other Vietnamese. Laconic Casey shows no trace of emotion — save perhaps embarrassment, and some sensible advice: “keep hiding from Americans, Sweetheart.”

The jacket of *Obscenities* says “the poems convey . . . a sense of the horror and futility of war.” They don’t. Sergeant BooBoo and Sergeant JohnJohn are too entertaining. But who needs more of the rhetoric that blurb implies? The poems convey a sense of raunchy vitality for which the war is a horrible and futile excuse.

But where Michael Casey was an MP and POW guard — hence did not have to endure too many corpses — D. C. Berry, like the Civil War Whitman who wrote “I am the man, I suffered, I was there,” was a medic. It shows. Berry’s *saigon cemetery*, compared with *Obscenities*, is less controlled, more groping in language and form. I think it is also

deeper. At least, another side. Where Casey is sociable, Berry is private and meditative. Where Casey holds his cool (by the skin of his teeth), Berry lets go, to vulnerability. Thus he imagines all things—being lung-shot in a rice paddy at sunset, being a dead boy's parents quarrelling over resurrection—"God woman ain't / no dead bulb gonna rise this May / never! God / pity you Martha!"—being a "mourning mamasan" with flowers, who walks like an unrooted flower "as on her / knees instead of her feet." He perceives with equal straining sensitivity a Phantom on its mission and the masterpiece oval of a GI helmeted head in an ice storm dewarming and going to putty. He writes poems home to his wife, is obsessed by nature, time and love, tries to find words while strangling on them. I should add that this is not "protest" poetry but a book of grieving, and so Berry is neither sentimental nor rhetorical, though he is angry—angry at Earth for her children:

tell their fathers that

*all the arms of
Man must be*

broken now!

Meanwhile back on the home front, William Harmon's *Treasury Holiday* (winner of a Lamont Poetry Prize) begins:

*I am the Gross National Product
absorb & including all things all goods Fab with Borax
Kleenex Clorox Kotex Kodak & Ex-Lax
I contain the spectacular car-crash death of the movie star Jayne
Mansfield
& the quiet death of John Masefield the word star equally
the Baby Ruth no less than the Crab Nebula
I do not distinguish or discriminate the murmuring
of pine & poison The gross the great the grand National
pure products the good doc said go crazy
Lord God of Hosts I am the Gross National Product of the
United States of America & here celebrate the New Fiscal Year
this fourth of July in the Lord's anno
one thousand plus one thousand minus one hundred plus fifty plus
ten plus five plus three ones
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and carries it from there. The literacy absorbs and includes, obviously, plenty of Whitman; also Pound, Ginsberg, Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Carl Sandburg, poor Kit Smart, some imitation Widsithy Gross Old English,

newspapers, comics and so on. Hero pursues action-packed and pun-filled episodes in his role of "teller" (of poems and money, natch), ringing up American dreams from John Coltrane to Nagasaki. Finishing o'erwearyed, I am of two minds. Mind One: this is a spectacular and brilliant book, and how Harmon manages to sustain his manic vitality throughout his "Thirty-four Fits" I cannot imagine. Mind Two:

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Dublin, Easter 1916

William Irwin Thompson. "A fine example of imagination working on imagination. . . . Mr. Thompson spells quite beautifully. I hope everyone will read him."—WILLIAM H. GLASS, *South Atlantic Quarterly*

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energetic, yes, but it smells like a Graduate School and gives me an academic headache. Let's see what he does for encores.

Eugene Wildman's *Nuclear Love* is officially "fiction," but that makes no never mind. No regular "fiction" reviewer is likely to review it, so I'll just mention that it is prose/poetry in sections called "clumps," one of which (clump 3) is a six-page concrete poem — among the best concrete poems I have seen — which made the turning of each leaf a plunge into the nature of Time. All praise to Swallow for the graphics involved here.

The scene of *Nuclear Love* is perhaps a theater, a madhouse, many cities, an archeological dig, a train in memory, a grand hotel, a playground. The hero is perhaps a Jew, perhaps a Mayan. Friends at times converse, put on plays. Lovers wander through centuries. The theme is — crudely — civilizations doing dissolves in somebody's head. On the other hand, "This archaic homeland is burning its way out of its skin and the new serpent is wriggling free. Like the serpent when the lips of Majhi part, this serpent with its double tongue is rising, sipping coffee." The theme is also, of course — as indicated graphically by the frontispiece (recurrent) of a pre-Columbian terra-cotta head whose lips are opened in a cry or song — the nature of art and language. "Art opposes monuments. We crave movement, air, a death in real light: as whales die, facing the sun, the mouth open." It's a collocation of interests like Charles Olson's — he the pioneer whale? Whatever: through its various experimental modalities, mostly in pain, the language of this book is as fresh as apple trees blossoming. Wildman has been editor of *Chicago Review* and of *Anthology of Concretism* and *Experiments in Prose*.

Alicia Ostriker

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NONSENSE

Reagan predicted that Mr. Nixon “can carry California and can be re-elected” and declared:

“ . . . it is not just another election — it is an election that will match a solid and consistent performer . . . against a group of politicians who have been on every side of almost every issue in the last few years.” (*Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1972.) Contributed by R. S. Becker, Berkeley, California.

Reviews and Previews

In room A (Seed Bed) Acconci lay hidden beneath a room-sized, slanting plywood false-floor intoning words of love to the women walking over him, masturbating and moaning into a microphone. . . . His work raises numerous questions about the nature of art. What is the expressive effect of the medium? What is its informational content? How intimate or self-revelatory can art be, and still be art and not life? Is all art a mirage, temporal, elusive and finally existing only in vague memories? Acconci's work is not pure poetry: it involves theatre, encounter, sculpture, collage and drawing. (*Art News*, March 1972.)

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“Why all the generosity?” asks McDonald's management. “This is our way of recognizing and encouraging scholastic achievement. We believe students who try harder and succeed should be rewarded.” (*Bloomington Herald-Telephone*, May 25, 1972.) Contributed by Bernard S. Morris, Bloomington, Indiana.

Evonne Goolagong is an Australian aborigine, the first member of her ancient, tragic race ever to play serious competitive tennis. (*The New York Times Magazine*, August 29, 1971.) Contributed by William Mather Boardman, Woodstock, Vermont.

EDITORS' NOTE: We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to *PR* will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.

LETTERS

UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

Sirs:

As a person who made an (unsuccessful) effort to review *Relearning the Alphabet* by Denise Levertov briefly & succinctly, I am sympathetic with G. S. Fraser as he attempts to review it in your winter issue (*PR* No. 4, 1971, p. 467) after establishing a context of good guys and bad guys (and "Ladies" — his word) in two sentences. I don't share his criteria. But he assures us that a difference between his and those of the reader will not mislead the reader: "At some stage every critic, to adapt de Gourmont, must generalize his prejudices into rules: it is safe enough for the reader if he knows what the prejudices are" (p. 478). His assurance would probably be true if his report on the poetry were accurate. He writes, "A test for dividing the two groups is the willingness or unwillingness to write poems about, or in terms of, other poets or poems, well-established myths, art forms" (p. 470). Good guys are willing, bad aren't. The relegation of *Relearning the Alphabet* to the second (bad) section suggests to the review-reader that Miss Levertov has no literary or mythological poems in her recent book. How misleading. Two of her finest poems in the volume are "Advent 1966" and "A Tree Telling of Orpheus." The first is a poem "in terms of" another poem (Southwell's "Burning Babe"); the second is a poem "about" a well-established myth. Two of her so-called Embroideries have a literary matrix. "Cloax" is a meditation on an epigraph from Yeats (a poem against strait-jacketing and smothering, one

needs to inform the reader, in case the Fraser-phrase "an occasional fit of the Mother-Smothers" misleads the review-reader into thinking that Miss Levertov is claustrophiliac). Other poems allude to Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Keats, Hopkins, Rilke. Indeed, one might object that *Relearning the Alphabet* is too literary. But my object in the present note is not to challenge the judgment of Fraser; it is to challenge the accuracy of his report on the poems.

Tony Stoneburner
Granville, Ohio

Sirs:

I can no longer restrain myself from writing you about the embarrassingly bad Winter 1971-72 issue of *Partisan*.

The main cause of my grief and anger is the review by G. S. Fraser of fourteen (14!) books of poetry in a scant ten pages or so. A poet of the talent and interest of Denise Levertov is thereby relegated to two sentences. Please, Mr. Phillips, you owe it to yourself as well as to your readership to make sure that her book is reviewed in a subsequent issue.

In addition to the grievous insult rendered Miss Levertov, who will of course survive, we must consider the general level of Mr. Fraser's review. The writing is a bad joke; that forced attempt to be "relaxed," and those *obiter dicta* that seem like rejects from a sophomore survey course, not to mention such hackneyed howlers as "the Mrs. Rooseveltian embrace of the professional liberal" (Mr. Fraser must think he's writing for a "pink rag" to throw in such a phrase) and a "Wittgensteinian focus on his general perceptions."

But surely you knew the piece

was badly written, as you must have known it was wretchedly conceived. But since you can print, in the same issue, such bad poems as those by Mr. Bertolino and a piece by Mr. Dickstein that mentions only *one* black poet (why not be accurate and call the piece "The New Black Novel"?), perhaps you don't realize what a disservice you are doing to poetry.

I have another suggestion to replace the one with which I concluded my second paragraph. Since *PR* still has "prestige," why not just stop dealing with poetry altogether? Stop printing it and stop reviewing it. At least that way you will cease to lower its status and acceptability. It is, truly, a minority art, but it deserves better treatment than that accorded porcelain miniatures, in, say, *Art News*.

I make this final suggestion to

you in all seriousness, and not as a rhetorical device.

Charles Molesworth
Flushing, N.Y.

Mr. Fraser replies:

Yes, indeed, I did review fourteen (originally fifteen) books of poetry in 2000 words, because I too felt that you needed a bit of lit. crit. after so many numbers so largely devoted to American Youth Politics or Apolitics. One has, yes, in that kind of review to be condensed and caricatural, dogmatic, flippant (though certainly not "relaxed": give one of your correspondents the same job the next time, and they will find they are sweating their guts out). I tried, within this space, to give quotations from a batch of poets whose poems I felt were written with

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enough pain and deliberation to let a few lines of their poetry act as a touchstone of the justice or injustice of my necessarily summary remarks about them. The ones huddled into a last summary paragraph were those to whom this old criterion of "memorable words" didn't seem to apply. I was *deliberately* rude about both Miss Levertov and Mrs. Roosevelt. I think Mrs. Roosevelt was a very good and generous woman, but all I have read about her reminds me of Ford Madox Ford's definition of the Moderate Liberal as somebody who instinctively dislikes having great art or literature in his house. About Miss Levertov, I feel that it is just as disgusting to be complacent about being a Woman as about being a Jew, a Negro, or a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant: we are dealt cards, and any complacency we deserve, if we ever deserve any, depends on how well we play them. I wasn't sorting out goodies or baddies but a kind of poetic writing which seems to be susceptible to old-fashioned detailed examination of the text and a sort which seems deliberately to defy that. I wasn't implying at all that Miss Levertov was subliterate, and, indeed, in one or two of the reviews in the first half of the piece (and in one you had to delete for space reasons) I made a case against the parasitism of literature on literature. I notice that neither of your correspondents questions any of my actual judgments, except that on Miss Levertov. I might look a fool perhaps in saying at the opening how witty and outward-turned, what a refreshing break-away from the inward-turned dream-song period, John Berryman's last volume was: and then he kills himself. But I am a poet and a critic of poetry, not a

consultant psychiatrist: and I would stick by my judgment of the *volume*. If I have any political or social biases I think I stated them honestly in the review: and, for instance, I think I would be with Miss Levertov on very many social and political issues, but it would be base and hypocritical to force myself *therefore* to pretend that I like her poetry. We must learn to dissociate ideas and to preserve such small areas as are left to us for the assertion of independent judgment.

EDITORS' NOTE: Readers are invited to join in.

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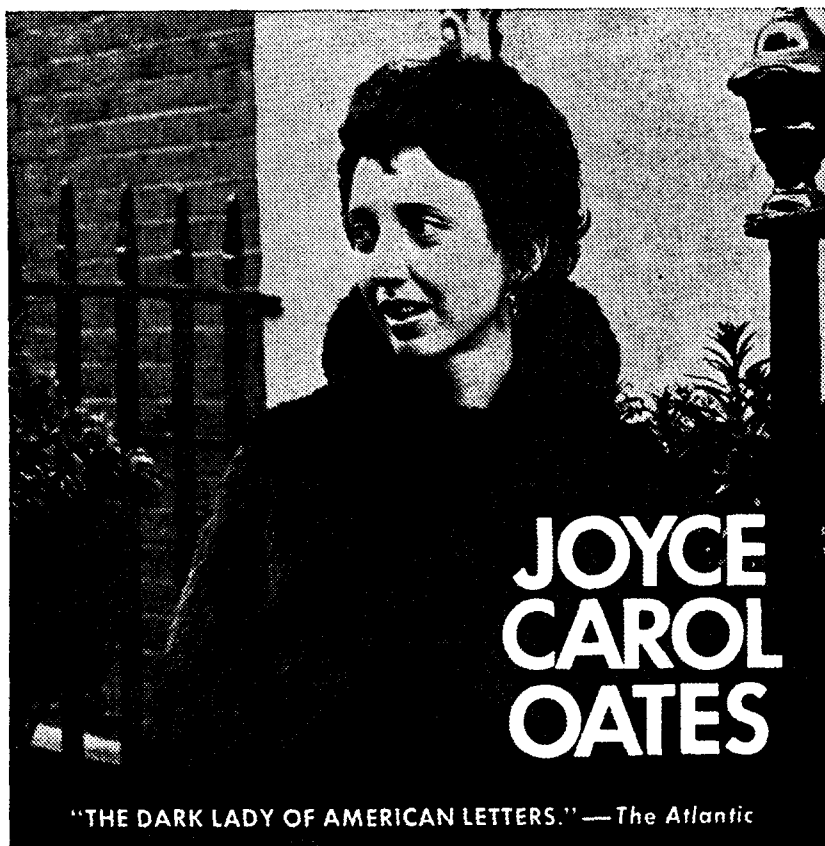
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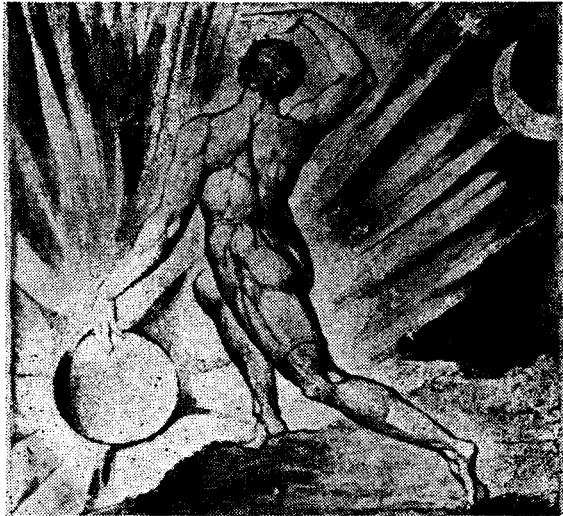
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